

Published by permission of Burns, Oates & Washbourn, London, England. THREE DAUGHTERS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

BY MRS. INNES-BROWNE

CHAPTER VI.

At an early hour the next morning the little family party met at breakfast, after which they went in a body on to the platform to say good-bye to Madge, and see her safely off in the train for Edinburgh. The three girls clung together, and made endless promises of writing often to each other, and Lady de Woodville gave Marie and Madge a most pressing invitation to go and stay at Baron Court with Beatrice.

They thanked her kindly, and fully hoped to be able to do so. Madge embraced her old companion tenderly; but her eyes were dim with tears, for in parting with them she felt she was parting with the last links that bound her to her old life, and instinctively she shrank from what might lie before her. Mary Medford, stiff and prim, but with the expression of a martyr upon her long face, was already seated in the carriage, when Madge rose herself away from her little friends and sprang in beside her.

Louis, who had carried her umbrella, followed her, and placed it upon the rack; then taking her hand, he shook it warmly, saying, "I do hope you will arrive safely and have a pleasant journey."

"Thank you," and Madge raised her tear-dimmed eyes to his. The boy bit his lips, and turning to Mary, said almost sternly, "Be kind to her, and be sure you take good care of her."

The woman, astonished at the tone of his voice, looked up, but meeting the honest gaze of the boy's eyes, her hard mouth relaxed into an amused smile as she answered civilly—"No fear, sir, I will do my duty by her."

He sprang out, and the door was instantly banged to, and the guard gave the signal to depart, which was answered by a shrill whistle from the engine; "Good-bye" was shouted from the group on the platform, and ere Madge could find her voice to reply, she was whirled away out of the dim station into the broad daylight.

"A most interesting young lady," remarked her ladyship. "There is more in her than meets the eye," said Beatrice warmly.

"Poor Madge," said Marie, wiping a tear from her eyes. "She's a brick," said Louis, who walked rapidly forward, and crossed to the opposite side of the station, all anxiety now to be off, inquiring from an official standing near, he learned that in about ten minutes time an express would start for Liverpool; so Marie was hurried into it, and Reginald, leaning upon the carriage door, expressed a wish that she would soon learn to think more leniently of the world, and not judge so harshly of its sincerity and worth."

The girls were saying their last adieus, but Marie found time to look up archly and say, with mock deference and a bewitching smile—"I am fortunate enough to meet with anything very worthy of my admiration, it shall be my endeavour to inform you of it, my lord."

He raised his hat and answered, "I shall hold you to your promise, Miss Blake. Au revoir until we meet again."

Off steamed the huge locomotive, dragging after it into the great wide world the second of our convent girls.

The thoughts of Beatrice now rushed with unrestrained force to her father and home, that fond father who, she felt certain, was counting the moments until he held her in his arms once more.

In a few hours they alighted at a small side station, the railway not having then extended very far into the lovely portion of the Surrey hills, where, standing amidst rich fields and woods of its own, rose the stately walls of Baron Court, the home of the De Woodville family. A summer shower had laid the dust, the roses were blooming, and the sweetbriar smelling its sweetest, as Beatrice, in her impulsive manner, darted on in front of the rest, so as to be able to speak a few kind words of greeting to the old coachman, who, with the aid of the dismounted footman, was endeavouring to hold in two spirited horses that the noise of the train had started, but whose ruddy face lit up with genuine joy as he saluted his young mistress.

"Welcome home, my lady. Thank God, there's no deed to ask if you are well."

"Thank you, yes, I am very well, and hope you are the same."

"Getting old, you see, and so the rheumatics trouble me now."

"Wait of exercise, John. I shall have to give you more work to do."

"And gladly I'll do it, my lady," chuckled the old man, who was immensely proud of his young mistress's horse-manship, and took great credit to himself for having taught her. Soon they all seated in the handsome carriage, John gave rein to the restless steeds, and away they dashed up and down the lovely winding roads, and past green and waving cornfields, now past rich meadows where the sheep were grazing, and the idle cattle standing, some of them knee-deep in the half-dry and stagnant-looking pools. The air was laden with sweet perfumes, the sturdy sunburnt village children stood and stared, or

clapped their hands with delight, as the handsome equipage rattled through the roughly paved streets. Many an old village patriarch doffed his cap, and many an honest woman curtsied with respect as she recognized the inmates of the stately carriage. On again, through a beautiful undulating country, studded with fine oak and elm trees, each turn of the road exposing to view some new and varied scenery; now and again a pretty farmhouse—the walls half hidden by luxuriant creepers—nestled cozily in the distance. The birds flitted blithely from tree to tree and called joyfully to each other; and the plaintive coo of the ringdove was heard in the valley as he answered his mate from the wood on the hill. All nature seemed to rejoice, and the youthful heart of the beautiful Lady Beatrice beat fast and joyfully as she leaned forward in the softly cushioned carriage and looked anxiously for the first glimpse of her happy home.

Down yet another valley, every turn and bend of which was familiar to the girl, and on the sunny side of the opposite hill rose the old and famous towers of Baron Court. Beatrice clasped her hands with delight as she caught sight of the large red flag flying proudly over the highest turret.

"Does it not look grand today?" asks Percy.

"Lovely!" answered Beatrice. "I wonder I could have been happy away from it!"

The high park pallings fly past, and with a graceful curve the horses turn in at the open lodge gate, near which stands the venerable figure of an old man with hat in hand and white hair flowing. Beatrice rises from her seat and waves her hand to him; he recognizes her, smiles, and waves his hat in return. Now they fly across the turreted stone bridge which spans from bank to bank the gently flowing river, with its pebbly bed glistening and shining in the sunlight, under the broad avenue of chestnuts, backed by the low sweeping branches of the beech; whilst in small groups the startled fallow-deer, turning, stand for a moment to look, then start and dive into the deeper dell for shelter. Up and down winds the drive through as lovely a park as there is in England, the grassy slopes forming natural terraces, each rising higher than the last, until a broad level plain is reached, where the stately trees stand singly and alone, each of sufficient beauty in itself to arrest the artist's eye; then the handsome pile of long grey stone buildings rise majestically before her, and Beatrice feels she is at home. Several of the towers are overgrown to their very top with green and closely cut ivy, and around the large abbey-shaped windows cluster rich creepers, and roses in great variety. The girl feels the truth of Lady Abbess's words, "God given you a beautiful home," and from her heart a prayer of gratitude ascends to Him who had been so bountiful to her. As yet Beatrice, you are right, as you sit and think that it would be difficult for any country to vie with us in the grandeur and stateliness of our old English homes.

There was one dear and sagacious old friend who had watched with loving eyes the preparations that were being made for the home coming of his young mistress. Continually of late he had heard the sweet name of "Bertie" or "Lady Beatrice" mentioned, and his large heart had swelled with joy at the sound of it, and now he paced majestically with quite the air of a lord chamberlain through the dainty little suite of apartments reserved for her own special use, and wagged his tail approvingly at all he saw going forward. This was Leo, the huge St. Bernard dog, Bertie's own particular pet and favourite. He knew quite well—there was no occasion for the Earl to persist in telling him that she was expected home; and when the carriage was preparing to start he had paced Leo, in spite of the hot weather, leapt around it in a most excited but ungracious fashion, then standing on his huge hind legs, endeavoured to spring upon the seat beside John whilst in deep rich tones he barked, as if to implore for permission to go also.

"No, no! down, old boy! I'll bring your mistress back, but there's no room for you!" and calling to a stable-boy, John bade him hold the dog safely until he had passed the lodge gate. Leo had afterwards joined his master, and together they paced about the grounds impatiently awaiting the first sound of the returning carriage. When at last they heard it, Leo bounded from his master's side and darted down the drive. Thus it was that Beatrice, leaving over the side of the carriage, spied the faithful beast; and when he heard her well-known voice calling to him, "Leo! Leo! dear old Leo!" he was almost beside himself with joy. He rolled upon the soft and velvety turf, jumped up again, and sprang about like an infantile elephant, barking all the while, and was in great danger of being crushed beneath the carriage wheels. Then the girl raised her eyes, and they rested on a tall, well-known figure standing waving his hand joyfully as he recognized his darling child, and before the carriage ceased moving she sprang out and was caught in the arms of her father.

Her father clasped the slight girl's form fondly to his heart, and kissing her, murmured in a broken voice, "Welcome home, my darling Bertie! My little one must never leave me again!" There was something in

the tone of his voice which struck a hollow chord in her heart, and sent a sickening chill through her frame. Why should her father be so moved? She had often left him before. Yes, why indeed? He asks himself the same question. Is it because he feels that the excitement of the moment is almost too much for him, causing his breath to come with greater difficulty, and his heart to flutter and palpitate beyond his own control? Or is it that the stifling cough, which follows, to him how very little he can now endure? Gently unwinding his arms from his little daughter's form, he wiped the cold damp from his brow, and, it may be, a tear from his eye, then together they entered the hall. Lady de Woodville, whose handsome brow was clouded, followed them. She cast a quick, searching, and troubled look at her husband. "A glass of wine will do you both good," she said coaxingly. "Come and shake hands with your father!" She did so, and he drank it off gratefully, and felt better for it.

"Does not our little girl look well?" asked the Countess cheerfully.

"She was always beautiful in my eyes," said the Earl fondly.

"Nay, my dear, please do not commence to spoil her by flattery. The very instant she arrives," pleaded his wife.

Beatrice slipped her arms around her father's neck, and kissing him answered, "He cannot spoil me now, I am too old and too wise to be spoiled."

"I am so glad to have you dear, sweet face and bright eyes beside me once more, darling. Nothing shall make me consent to your returning to school again."

"No! she shall remain with us, since you wish it to be so," replied the Countess; "but with this understanding, that she is still a child, and pursues her studies at home for at least twelve months; bear in mind she is only just seventeen."

"Believe me, mother dear, I have no wish to be taught less than a child for many years yet. Why, you cannot think how good I have become all at once," said the girl, with mock dignity. "Only wait until you get my school report, that will astonish you. I am supposed to have the humility of a St. Francis, the charity of a St. Elizabeth, and the obedience of —"

"All the saints combined," broke in Percy, who that moment entered that hall, followed by Leo. The dog sprang upon Beatrice, who threw her arms around his shaggy neck, and kissed his great rough head, whilst he answered her caresses by whining and fawning upon her with every symptom of delight.

"Down, Leo," said Percy. "Come, Bertie, I long to show you all the pretty things prepared for you in your little boudoir." So saying, he led the way, three steps at a time, up the broad and costly carpeted staircase, past the carved oak balustrades, past the quaint-looking old pictures, where the framed faces looked down upon the youthful couple with satisfied expressions. Beatrice sprang lightly beside her brother, and hand in hand they traversed the long picture-gallery, too much occupied in merry chatter to note the few changes that had occurred since last she had trodden that brightly polished floor.

The Earl watched them depart, then turning to his wife, he said proudly—

"How lovely Beatrice has grown!" "Yes, she is very pretty," calmly answered his wife; "but the chief charm about her beauty is that she does not know it, and the less she troubles herself about her appearance at present the better, I think."

"You are perfectly right, Florence; I love her best in her sweet originality. Her manners are so charming, so graceful, I could sit and watch her all the day."

"Well," replied the Countess, smiling, "remember it is a compact between us that you will endeavour not to spoil her. There will be numberless foolish people found who will inform her of her many charms; do you and I, my content ourselves by trying to keep her innocent and simple. By the way, how delighted Percy is to have her back again; he is very fond of his sister. Yes, I always think he manages her better than any of us; he submits to her in trifles, and yet commands her in greater things."

Now at heart the Countess was essentially a worldly-minded woman, fond of dress and amusements, and in every way well-calculated to fill with credit the high position she held; certainly the dignity of the De Woodville family had lost nothing of its power and influence since the Lady Flora Fortescue had condescended to wear the coronet. Still with all, if her pride had at times been the cause of suffering to gentler souls than hers she was kind-hearted and generous to the poor, and that for one in her position was felt to atone for late. However, her manners of late, especially regarding her husband, appeared to have undergone a change. She often watched him anxiously when he was not aware of it, and it was noticed that she was much more attentive to his wants than formerly. Those who knew her said she had some trouble upon her mind; it was so unlike her to sit for long periods at a time with her hands clasped upon her knees, a frown upon her brow, and as besides which, she possessed the true instincts of a lady, and treated those beneath her with the greatest consideration and affability.

TO BE CONTINUED

WHEN BAB RAN AWAY.

Barbara bit her lips to keep back the tears, as she sat beside the window gazing out at the snowy landscape. A fierce wave of homesickness for the dear, sunny southland, swept over her with overwhelming force. She leaned her head on the window-sill and sobbed, as only a homesick, twelve-year-old girl can sob.

"St. Joseph's day, and not a flower, or shrub, or even a tiny new leaf! The magnolia trees were in full bloom now at the dear old hall, filling the balmy air with fragrance; and there were violets and lilies and primroses, to say nothing of the jonquils and yellow daffodils."

Barbara associated St. Joseph's day with color, fragrance, the new life and new hopes which the early springtime reawakens in the old hearts and young.

"I cannot bear it!" she sobbed, covering her face with her hands to shut out the unfamiliar, forbidding, outside world.

Her mother died when she was but a baby; and her stepmother, absent-minded father, absorbed in his books, and in his "experiments," left her almost wholly to the care of the servants. Rousing himself on rare occasions to a sense of his duty and responsibility, as a parent, he procured suitable governesses and music masters, and felt in his absent-minded way, that having every intellectual advantage, his little daughter could have no other wants. So, for the most part, Barbara or Bab, as she was familiarly called, lived a carefree life among the dear wild things she loved.

But her father's sudden death, and the foreclosure of the mortgage on the dear old hall, with its attendant consequences, her transplanting to northern soil, into the home of an aunt, whom she scarcely knew, had put an end to all the dear familiar ways.

"I cannot bear it!" burying her face deeper in her hands, so deeply that she did not hear the light tap on the door, or notice its opening, until a faint, familiar perfume caused her to start and turn. "It's for you, Miss Bab, an' 'e Missus' tell me to fetch it right up. She's your eyes tight, honey chile, an' smell 'e'd, an' you'll 'tink you's back at de' ol' Hall wif de magnolys bloomin' right at de do'."

"Oh, mammy! where did it come from?" Bab cried, springing to her feet with a low cry of wonder, her eyes shining through wet lashes. "I spee! de angels done sen' it, 'e's you's so pow'ful homesick!" Chloë said, a suspicious tremor in her old voice.

Bab looked up quickly. "And you are homesick, too," she cried. "It was selfish of me to take you away from the old familiar things—"

"Dar, now, honey lam, don' you go frettin' bout you' ol' mammy," Chloë broke in soothingly. "You 'member how I say to Miss' Granville 'E' you'd better 'ave to tote dis 'ol' nighan' long 'o' whar' my young Missy goes, dar I go too. De new Missus jes' smile an' say, 'Com' long wid you, I lak you' faithfulness.' An' she sho'ly done been a kin' Missus."

"Aunt Mary is kind and good," Bab said, tugging at the cord with eager fingers, "but the North is not the South."

"Sho'ly not, sho'ly not!" Chloë assented with a sigh. "There! I thought I never would get that knot untied. Oh! look, mammy! magnolys blossoms and violets—on a bed of our own southern moss! Who could have sent it?"

"Dar's a note dar undah de v'lets," Chloë began excitedly; but Bab had already torn it open.

"It is from dear old Newson!" she exclaimed, half laughing and half crying.

"Listen, Mammy, 'o my dear, well-remembered pupil, Barbara Aline Burton, I send this nosegay from the old garden back of the Hall." With love, JANE NEWSON.

"Oh, the dear old thing! And to think how I used to treat her playing all sorts of tricks on her, hiding her glass, and stealing her peppermints, and now she has sent me this delicious breath from the old garden at home! Oh, it was dear of her—I'll never forget her."

"It is from my dear old governess," Chloë said, slowly. "Shes you' eyes up tight, an' smell 'e'd, Miss Bab. Ain't it jes'—jes' heavenly?"

"They were still 'smellin' ha'd,' when the door opened softly, and Mrs. Granville entered. She smiled in quick sympathy.

"How delicious!" she cried gently, taking a deep breath, "and how beautiful! It brings back my own far-away childhood, and the memory of a dear, tangled old garden, filled with just such fragrances."

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"It is from dear old Newson!" she exclaimed, half laughing and half crying.

"Listen, Mammy, 'o my dear, well-remembered pupil, Barbara Aline Burton, I send this nosegay from the old garden back of the Hall." With love, JANE NEWSON.

"Oh, the dear old thing! And to think how I used to treat her playing all sorts of tricks on her, hiding her glass, and stealing her peppermints, and now she has sent me this delicious breath from the old garden at home! Oh, it was dear of her—I'll never forget her."

"It is from my dear old governess," Chloë said, slowly. "Shes you' eyes up tight, an' smell 'e'd, Miss Bab. Ain't it jes'—jes' heavenly?"

"They were still 'smellin' ha'd,' when the door opened softly, and Mrs. Granville entered. She smiled in quick sympathy.

"How delicious!" she cried gently, taking a deep breath, "and how beautiful! It brings back my own far-away childhood, and the memory of a dear, tangled old garden, filled with just such fragrances."

"Bab explained, touching the waxy petals caressingly.

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