

THREE DAUGHTERS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

BY MRS. INNES-BROWNE

CHAPTER I.—CONTINUED

"I approve of your affection for Mary Blake, she is a good child, and I hope you will both continue your friendship when you enter the world."

"Depend upon it, I will, Father. But goodbye, I must go now into the class-room."

"No," answered the priest; "remain where you are, and once more ask God and His Blessed Mother with all confidence to help you; you will be a good girl yet."

"But, Father, Mother Agatha said that as a punishment I must go to the class-room!"

"And I desire you to remain where you are until I send for you," said the old priest firmly. He rose and sauntered out into the grounds; where at no great distance he saw Mother Agatha, and beckoned her to come to him.

She was soon at his side, when he said abruptly, "You must not be too hard upon Beatrice de Woodville; her time with us is very short now, and she is a brave girl."

"She is a dear girl," returned Mother Agatha; "but really she looked and spoke in such an angry tone to Isabel, and I thought a little quiet and retirement would best restore her to her calmer self, yet how much rather would I deal with a nature like hers than with one like Isabel's!"

"You must not be too hard upon her either," remarked the old priest kindly. "Isabel comes from a different stock; she has had a bad training; with time we can do much for her by proving that, in the Schools of the Sanctuary, wealth and rank are reckoned as nothing in comparison with honor and virtue."

"What was that?" and Mother Agatha took a few steps forward. It was only Isabel again. For the second time that day she had overheard what was not intended for her. The girl was seated upon the grass, her crimson face hidden in the leaves of her book.

"Rise, Isabel! the grass is too treacherous for you to sit upon at this season," said Mother Agatha. The girl obeyed, whilst the priest scanned her closely.

"Go," he said, "to the alcove by yonder arch, and tell Beatrice I desire to speak to her, and return yourself also!"

The girl bowed, and departed on her errand. How would Beatrice receive her, she wondered, and her heart beat faster with fear and excitement.

"Collect the rest of the 'United Kingdom,' I wish to speak to them all, Mother," added he.

Away went the kind Sister, and soon Marie and Madge were beside the good priest, wondering much why he wished to talk to them.

"I am aware that it must appear almost childish to relate every detail of a simple outburst of temper like the above; but if we are to follow the history of our 'Convent girls,' it is quite necessary that we should have an insight into their characters as schoolgirls. Again, if it is true that 'As the boy is, so will the man be,' it is equally certain that the girl forecasts the woman; and I must endeavor to show how well or ill fitted these girls were to play their part on that great stage of life, where, whether conspicuously, or hidden by the great ranks in front, we all must take our place and play our part."

Whilst the members of the "United Kingdom" are being collected, we will sketch Madge as she stands before Father Egbert.

She is tall, but certainly not elegant-looking. There is so much that requires rounding and toning in her form, that we almost wonder where the charm can lie that irresistibly attracts everyone towards her. Surely it cannot be in the heavy coils of chestnut hair, which are so badly arranged that they hide the shape of the pretty head; nor in the hands and feet, so large and yet so shapely, projecting respectively in unartistic fashion from the outgrown sleeves and skirt of her dress. True, her complexion would be lovely if it were not spoiled by the healthy brown freckles which greatly dim its lustre. Stay! look, she smiles; and at once you discover that there is a soul, a warmth beneath that calm exterior, which needs but to be touched to rouse it into life. There is a sweet expression upon her face; the lips are parted, which before hid from view those two rows of small white teeth. The cheeks, that at first sight appeared almost too plump and round, are pressed by the rosiest smiles; and her blue-grey eyes, so clear and honest, are flooded with mirthful fun.

Dear Madge! life lies before you! smile while you may. You would be well satisfied to go your own quiet way, pleased that others, better than yourself, should press forward and take the laurels of victory, content so long as you were permitted to pass unmolested, sharing your good nature and smiles with all around you. But it must not be! All that is good and beautiful lies hidden within you must be brought to the surface, for there is much work even now waiting for you to do. She gives her wayward hair a shake with both hands. Poor Madge! Already that heavy load of hair has caused her much sorrow and trouble. Some

of her companions, more ill-mannered than the rest, have upbraided her for its color, and said unkind things about it, forgetting that He who made it loves not to hear His works so criticized. But heed not their unkind taunts, dear girl; for each year you live will tone down and render that hair more beautiful; and whence those same companions are vainly striving to restore the lustre of their once sunny locks yours will have a unique beauty of its own, which they would give much to possess. Madge is a great favorite with the good Lady Abbess; why, her companions cannot discover. But no one is jealous of her, she is so humble and simple. Ah! they little know how often as girls, Margaret Gordon (Madge's mother) and Marie de Valois (the now Lady Abbess) knelt together before the high altar at St. Benedict's and vowed eternal friendship to each other; and how, when troubles fell thick and fast upon Margaret Gordon, Marie de Valois, mindful of the friend of her girlhood, sent for her only daughter, and lavished upon her the love and care of a second mother.

Oh ye old-world homes! How many sweet young lives have you not sheltered, tended, and fostered; how many brave young hearts have you not fortified and sent forth to fight life's battles! Many of your favoured ones, at the call of Heaven, have forsaken all and gone joyfully to the shelter of the sanctuary, to serve God in charity, purity, and innocence, all the days of their lives. Countless others, strengthened by all they had learnt and seen beneath your roof, have striven bravely through the heats and burdens of life, resolved that no distance, however great, should sever them from their loved ones, for were not their old comrades continually beseeching Heaven in their behalf? Yes, no matter how bright and fascinating the whirl of gaiety into which they must plunge, nor how deep the grief and misery they must traverse, nothing could ever quite dim in their ears the sound of the old vesper bell or the sweet low chant of their Sisters' voices.

Isabel reached the alcove, and peeping in, saw Beatrice seated upon the very rock which Father Egbert had so lately occupied.

"Bertie!" she said, in a hesitating, confused manner, "Father Egbert has sent me to tell you he wishes to speak to you."

"Very well," was the cheerful reply; "I will go at once." She rose, and kissing the rosary she held in her hands, slipped it into her pocket. "Come along," she continued, passing her arm through that of her late antagonist; "we will go together."

"O Bertie! first of all forgive me for what I said about Marie; I did not know she had such grand relations."

"What do you mean?" said Beatrice, drawing herself up and looking straight at Isabel with a puzzled expression. "Whatever did you take Marie to be? Surely you know a lady when you see her!"

"Oh yes, of course! it was not that exactly, but—but—"

"Well, never mind. I was in the wrong, and ought to have been more patient. Forgive me, Isabel, and I will try not to be so hasty in the future."

The old priest looked pleased as he saw the girls approaching in a manner so friendly, and he nodded and smiled kindly at Beatrice, who sprang with a light bound to Marie's side, whilst Madge kept her place at the other.

"Come here, Mother," said Father Egbert, "I wish you to grant me a favour. Some of those little girls have been rather naughty today, but they are very sorry for it. Eh, children! is it not so?" He was answered by a chorus of "Yes, Father, yes." Well, then, Mother Agatha, do not punish them; they must lose neither ribbons nor marks; it is holiday time, and all too soon some of them will take flight and leave us. By the way, Marie," he asked, "is there not soon to be a reception of the children of Mary?"

"It is fixed for the 15th of May, Father."

"Then I wish especially that Beatrice should be received, and I will be guarantee for her good conduct."

"Father!" exclaimed Bertie, taking the old priest's outstretched hand, "how can I ever thank you sufficiently?"

"By being a good child and fulfilling all my hopes regarding you," he replied.

"With God's help I will try, and you shall be proud of your wilful Bertie yet; only pray for me."

"I never forget any of you at Holy Mass, children. There I run and have a good romp whilst you may."

Away sped the "United Kingdom," and on that day was over, the precious document written by Beatrice was copied, signed and sealed by Marie and Madge.

"It is strange how I shall miss those three girls," he thought. "There is something so very sweet about each of them. Marie is a little saint; no one will ever fill her place. Madge, always so good-natured; and her voice, it is marvelous how it moves me; the choir will sound quite dead without her. Then there is my little poor favourite, so beautiful and so clever, and she does not know it. God grant the hours may never spoil her! I must pray hard for her; and she must write and open her heart to me. She is too candid and noble not to tell me everything, and I may be able to help her still."

Thus ruminating, the kind old man entered his room and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER II.

The few days of holiday have passed, and study has recommenced in earnest. The examinations are to be very severe this term. Beatrice, though almost certain of gaining some of the principal prizes, will have to work hard to compete with one or two of her French companions, who are sure to run her very close. She is well aware of this, and the knowledge spurs her on to do her utmost. The 15th of May is also fast approaching; the day on which Beatrice is to be made a Child of Mary. A great change has come over the girl since she saw her last; not one angry or hasty word has she uttered; and there is a look of earnest thought upon her beautiful face which her companions have never seen there before.

It is now the eve of the 15th, and in the pretty stone chapel, erected specially for the use of the children of Mary, a quiet little figure may be seen moving to and fro. It is the president of that society, our little friend Marie. "Everything," she repeats to herself, "must be gorgeous for tomorrow; dear old Bertie is to be received."

Each evening, for days past, has witnessed little Marie kneeling with bowed head before that altar, pouring out her soul to the Mother she loves so well. She never knew her earthly mother, she having died the day her little daughter was born; and the child had learned to console her every grief and sorrow to the Blessed Mother of God.

"I am going into the world soon," she murmurs, "but, O mother, you know my little secret. I trust and hope it will not be for long."

Poor child! though she was oppressed with grief at the thought of leaving the home and friends that seemed all in all to her, yet deep down in her heart of hearts lay the sweet fond hope—"I shall return soon I feel I shall!"

Everything is still and quiet in the convent to-night. Beatrice and Madge are silently arranging the white dresses and veils for the children of Mary to wear tomorrow. Another girl, who has charge of the Communion veils, is placing them in their respective places. All the communicants are to receive Holy Communion tomorrow, and the evening before must be spent in quiet and recollection.

Beatrice glances hurriedly at the clock in the dormitory, and seeing it is nearly seven, whispers to Madge, "Finish these for me, dear; I have something to do." She hurries down the broad staircase, and then into another and at last seeing Mother Agatha at the farther end of a long corridor, she darts after her and asks in a low voice, "Dear Mother may I run out for five minutes? I will not be longer?"

Mother Agatha glanced at her watch and replied, "Yes, child, you may go; but do not remain out longer than five minutes, it is rather chilly tonight."

Away sped Beatrice to her little alcove. How dearly she had learnt to love it lately! The encouraging words of Father Egbert sounded continually in her ears, and she felt she gained strength each time she rose from the foot of the cross where she knelt.

The face of Madge had worn a serious far-away look all the day. A letter received that morning from her mother informed her that she and her father were leaving forever their pretty home amongst the hills, and the only remark Mrs. Fitz Allan had passed upon it was, "Pray for us, my darling; life is sometimes very hard, but God knows what is the best for us." Madge had read and re-read the letter, which puzzled her dreadfully. Naturally of a reticent nature, she spoke to no one of it, but anxiously pondered over it in her mind. Her dear brother had died of fever, and she had not been permitted to see him! Now the old home was gone! What could it all mean? Something was being kept from her! What or who would be the next to go? Not her mother surely! Ah no! God would not ask such a sacrifice! "It is time I took my place beside my mother," she thought; "she shall lean on me for help and support. I am young and strong, and she was always so fragile and delicate." And Madge's face wore what her companions called her "inspired look." Her bright eyes seemed to dilate, and new things hidden from others; her cheeks flushed, and her lips moved as if communing with herself.

It was in this mood her companions loved her best; for she was gifted with a marvellous talent for music and poetry, and when her soul was stirred within her, would pour out her feelings in impassioned strains, till every listener was awed to silence.

Her gift for music came from both her parents, but the beautiful voice she inherited from her mother, and often the tears rose unbidden to the eyes of the Lady Abbess as she listened spell-bound to that clear young voice in the choir, for it carried her vividly back to the days when she and her cherished friend Margaret Gordon were girls together.

The day of the 15th dawned bright and unclouded. Mass was over, nuns and children had been to Holy Communion, and the two long rows of white-veiled maidens wended their silent way down the still cloisters to the refectory. At ten o'clock precisely all was in readiness at the Lady Chapel. Every spring flower that the wood and Convent garden could produce had been plucked and daintily arranged by Marie.

"The tapers were lit on the altar, With garlands of lilies between; And the steps leading up to the statue Flashed bright with roses' red sheen; The sun-gleams came down from the heavens, Like angels, to hallow the scene, And they seemed to kneel down with the shadows That crept to the shrine of the Queen."

Bright rays of sunlight gleamed and shone through the windows, lighting up and tinting as if with glory the white-veiled heads of the children of Mary, as they knelt in rows watching patiently for Father Egbert to enter. Behind them knelt the rest of the children, and beyond them again came the novices and nuns.

The Lady Abbess and Mother Agatha alone occupied prominent places amongst the children—the former, because she loved to join in all the devotions of those committed to her care; the latter, because being mistress of the school it was necessary that she should be near to help her children.

In the centre of the little choir knelt the six candidates, Beatrice and five of her French companions. Presently Father Egbert walked through the double file of little maidens, and gently took the seat prepared for him. No need to dwell upon what followed, the scene is so familiar to every Child of Mary. The choir sang a warm and stirring discourse, in which he reminded those who were about to consecrate themselves for ever to the tender care of the Mother of God, to shun and fly sin as the greatest evil, no matter what guise or mask it wore; to ask themselves in every doubt and difficulty how "Mary" would have acted; to try and imitate her in her deep love of God and her spotless purity, and thus deserve to be claimed by her at death, and admitted to the presence of their God. The choir delivered a warm and stirring discourse, in which he reminded those who were about to consecrate themselves for ever to the tender care of the Mother of God, to shun and fly sin as the greatest evil, no matter what guise or mask it wore; to ask themselves in every doubt and difficulty how "Mary" would have acted; to try and imitate her in her deep love of God and her spotless purity, and thus deserve to be claimed by her at death, and admitted to the presence of their God.

"They came two by two to the altar, The young and the pure and the fair— Their faces the mirror of heaven, Their hands folded meekly in prayer; They came for a simple blue ribbon, For love of Christ's mother to wear; And, I believe, with the children of Mary, The angels of Mary were there."

After each of the six had received her medal and ribbon, Marie, who knelt beside Madge in the front rank, whispered, "Let us sing the Ave Maria." Then each young voice arose in pleasing harmony; but gradually, and as if by instinct, they ceased, and one alone carried on the song. It was Madge—she was greatly moved; unknown sorrow and trouble, like a grim specter, loomed in the dim distance, and beckoned her on she knew not whither. The face of one of the painted cherubs over the altar appeared as that of her departed brother, whilst a picture of the "Mother of Sorrows" wore the loved features of her mother. She was not aware that every voice save her own had ceased. Carried away by her feelings, she poured forth in clear and thrilling notes the sweet words of the Ave Maria, until the vault of the little chapel echoed again and again, and the delighted hearers, hushed and awed, feared only the moment when it should cease. It was—

"A voice with the tones of an angel, Never flower such a sweetness distilled; It faded away—but the temple With its perfume of worship was filled."

When the faint sound of the last sweet note had died away, the Lady Abbess, whose watchful eyes had noted the bright spots that burned on the face, and the strange light in the eyes of her second Margaret, rose from her knees, and moving gently to the place where Madge knelt with her burning face now hidden in her hands, she touched the child lightly on her shoulder and bade her "come and kneel beside her."

The old priest was seen to draw his handkerchief hurriedly across his eyes; then rising, he requested them all to kneel whilst he blessed them; after which, without another word, he walked slowly down the aisle, and such scenes as these make deep impressions upon the old as well as

the young. Those who have weathered the storms and tempests of life look with tender, pitying love upon those young and innocent ones who must follow, and wonder in their kind old hearts who will stand near to encourage and cheer their dear ones in their hour of trial when their first protectors shall lie cold and helpless in the tomb.

As the children dispersed, leaving the little chapel once more empty and still, the Lady Abbess drew Madge aside, and leading her into a little room apart, looked at her with that quiet penetrating glance for which she was so famous, and asked in kindly tones what it was that had moved her so and caused her to sing as she had done that morning. Not quite knowing what answer to give, Madge lowered her eyes and toyed nervously with the prayer-book she held in her hand. The Lady Abbess seated herself, and drawing the girl closely, she said, "Look up, dear child, and I will tell you what is troubling you. It is the thought of your mother having to leave her pretty home, and you know as well as I do the trial it will be to her. But, Madge, your mother hides nothing from me, and she is as noble as she is good, and will not repine if she thinks that God calls her to make the sacrifice. You, my child, you are young and strong as yet, and God will bless and strengthen you, dear, for I have studied your character, and I know you have a brave heart, and your mother will not lean on you in vain. Have courage, and no matter how heavily the cross may press upon you, remember that it is your Father in heaven who bids you carry it, and He will never try you beyond your strength. You have one true friend here—namely, many, who will never forget their little Madge, but continually remember you before God's altar. So cheer up, dear one, and for the sake of your mother, be brave and hide from her anything that you suffer. It will ease her poor heart, and something tells me I can depend upon you."

"Yes," answered Madge firmly, "with God's help I will assist my mother and forget myself for her!"

"That is spoken as Margaret's child should speak," said the Lady Abbess, rising and laying her hand tenderly on the girl's thick wavy tresses. "And now God bless you, dear child; run away, and do not lose your bright roses by brooding too much over what cannot be helped. God knows what is the best for us, and the clouds will disperse at His bidding, and the sun will shine brighter after the interval of darkness."

"Thank you, dear mother," said Madge cheerfully; "I will try and remember what you say."

After the girl had departed, the Lady Abbess clasped her hands together, and fixing her fine eyes on the fast-fleeting clouds, she murmured:

"Poor child! so young to face the hard, cold world! God give her strength to aid and comfort her brave Margaret! How wild and merry she was wont to be! how these old walls resounded with her laughter and now I wonder what she is like, poor Margaret!"

Studies were suspended for this day, and many were the congratulations bestowed upon the six "children of Mary," whose hearts overflowed with good resolutions to brave anything rather than disgrace the new titles they now bore.

TO BE CONTINUED

A VICTIM OF SPIRITISM

A TRUE STORY

Many years ago I was director of a boys' sodality. There were among its members an interesting lad, about sixteen years of age, a son of a highly respected family. I used to notice his thoughtful mien, as he stood in the college yard during recreation hours, never joining in the games of his fellow students. On questioning him about the amusements that interested him, I learned that he spent hours every day at his home practicing sleight-of-hand, in which he became remarkably skilful. So I induced him one day to give an entertainment of this kind to his fellow students; and, young as he was he was really amused them for an hour or two with brilliant success.

It was certainly in itself a harmless accomplishment, yet it became for him an occasion of serious danger. For after leaving college, he was so enraptured with this amusement that he undertook to travel to distant cities and there give exhibitions of his skill upon the public stage. This brought him into contact with other showmen, who enticed him to exchange his white magic for black, and become a real Spiritist.

Of course, under these circumstances he could not practice his holy religion, which absolutely forbids all dealings with the power of darkness. But he was ill at ease; for besides his own qualms of conscience, his pious mother, when he returned home, was quick to discover the sad change that had come over her son, who was then no longer the pious youth he had formerly been. Probably she did not suspect to what depths he had fallen, but she knew he no longer went to confession, and she did not desert from her lectures to him on the subject. He was not actually convinced himself that Spiritism was devilry; it was the spirits of the dead he meant to conjure up and not the demons of hell. True,

Holy Writ forbids all such practices; for the Lord told the Jews through His servant Moses: "Neither let there be amongst you any one . . . that consulteth soothsayers or observeth dreams or omens; neither let there be any wizard or charmer, nor any one that consulteth pythonic spirits or fortune-tellers, nor that seeketh the truth from the dead. For the Lord abhorreth all these things, and for these abominations He will destroy them at thy coming. (Deut xviii. 10-12).

Meanwhile Mr. Mum, for I will call him so hereafter, had made the acquaintance of a number of Spiritists, men and women, and had become a frequent attendant at their seances, where his superior education and his refined manners made him a general favorite. But he became more and more convinced that the spirits conjured up by himself and others were depraved and lying beings, and began to suspect that they might well be very demons. One night, as he afterwards told me with a shudder, he conjured up before himself alone, the soul of his departed father, but the spirit that answered the call showed himself to be so depraved that Mr. Mum was perfectly convinced this could not be his father's soul, but verily an imp of Satan.

I was away from that city for some years, and when I returned on a brief visit, I learned, through his good mother, that her boy had totally abandoned the Catholic faith, so I determined to look him up, and see what I could do to bring him back. I had gone but a couple of squares when I met him, as he was coming to pay me a visit, probably urged to do so by his mother's persuasion. Our meeting was very cordial. He told me everything that I have so far narrated, and added that, after understanding the devilish character of Spiritism, he had invited all his Spiritist friends to a meeting one afternoon in his mother's spacious parlor, had told them there of his thorough conviction of the diabolical nature of their practices, so that all of them left the place in a high dudgeon.

I easily induced him to go with me to a religious house, where he made a devout retreat of five days, and thence returned home a reformed and a happy man. He felt so grateful that he was eager to render me some service. For this purpose he came to the distant college where I was then residing, and gave an entertainment to the students on two successive nights, performing at the first a great variety of tricks of sleight-of-hand, and at the second explaining how each of them had been managed. Then he made a feeling address to the boys, cautioning them against the dangers attending Spiritism of which he said he had had a sad experience.

Unfortunately, he did not persevere, and, in the words of Holy Writ, the last state of that man was worse than the first. A few years later I happened to visit his city again, and heard about his sad relapse. I called on him at once, and was very cordially received. He told me the story of his second fall.

"One day," he said, "I took from a public library a book that aroused my curiosity, as it dealt with Hindu magic. As I left the building, I was accosted by a stranger, who said he was well pleased to have seen me selecting that volume for private reading. Our casual meeting led to frequent visits to one another, at which he excited by curiosity more and more, promising me much wonderful revelations. At last he took me to a solitary spot in a woody vale, and there conjured up a large fire and in the midst of the flames a female form. A few days later I met that young lady at a ball, and at once fell in love with her. She returned my affection, and marriage with her was seriously contemplated. She was a Spiritist father and mother who lived in New York."

Mr. Mum then told me how her parents were informed by a friend that their daughter was keeping company with a Catholic gentleman on which they ordered her to come home immediately. She suddenly departed for her parents' home, and when he heard of it, he went post-haste after her, and a short time after they were married before a squire. She was not baptized and so their matrimony was invalid. When his mother learned it all, she thought it best to ask them both to come and live with her, in the hope that she might procure their conversion. He took me to see his wife and their little child, a bright little girl, but not baptized; and all I could obtain from him was that he would have her baptized if ever she was in danger of death.

That same night he called on me for a longer conversation, as I had requested him to do, in the hope that I might bring him back to better sentiments. But I was totally disappointed. He was so deluded that he imagined his soul at times left his body, and traveled abroad, where he saw most wonderful visions. He had even become a contributor to an English periodical called the Luciferian, and he showed me some articles he had published in it of his own signature. I was so shocked by his blasphemous talk that I deemed it my duty to express my deep indignation and I dismissed him from my presence.

Years passed, I live in a far distant city and had no hope of being of any service in the matter. In fact, though I had visited his town occasionally, I had not called on him again, as he seemed to be obdurate and our parting from each other had been definite, as I thought.

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