

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

BY MRS. INNES-BROWN

CHAPTER I

In one of the northern provinces of France, on the outskirts of an old town, there stood for centuries the famous old Abbey of St. Benedict. No one could pass it unnoticed, so impressive and imposing was its appearance. The lower portion of the building, particularly the strong and massive pillars and rounded doors, spoke of a time when Norman architecture was in the ascendant; whilst the Gothic-shaped windows and lighter artistic pinnacles and spires pointed to a much later date.

However, there this old convent home stood, rearing proudly its time-worn and venerable walls amidst the luxuriant foliage around it; whilst its tall, white, and gilded spires caught and reflected back the early morning sun, bidding many a traveller pause to gaze upon it with admiring eyes. The country on all sides was undulating and fertile, though there rose some bold and rocky hills on the east which served to break the colder winds of winter, and add an air of romance and beauty to the stately Abbey beneath.

It was built in quadrangles; one portion—that which joined the church—was set apart for the use of the priest, and also the great chambers; on the sunniest side were the schoolrooms, large and airy, beside which the big trees and the vines had struck their deepest roots, as though determined to tempt with their delicious fruit the weaker daughters of Eve; then came the cloisters and community portion; whilst the novitiate occupied the lower buildings at the back. The private grounds, which were extensive and well kept, contained many and many sweetly shaded walks, some of them set apart for the use of the community only, and known by name as "The Enclosure."

This famous convent was chosen not only by the best French families as a seminary for their daughters but wealthy English parents, with those of other nations, were often tempted to send their children there, not merely for the completion of their education in languages and the finer arts, but what was far more consequent, because they might be thoroughly grounded in the principles of religion and the practice of virtue. There was something at once refined and solid in the character of the young ladies who left this convent; they rarely failed to do well in whatever station of life they occupied, and there were few of them whose hearts in after years did not melt with tenderness at thought of their happy girlhood at the old Benedictine Abbey. Often indeed the thought was a safeguard in the hour of trial and temptation.

Now save those who have known and felt the depth and strength of the love and unity which prevails in these old convent homes can form any idea of the effects a training in them leaves upon the character of their children in after years. It is almost incredible the simplicity which characterised these girls, many of whom, by reason of birth and title, might well claim precedence over the others; but all dignity and grandeur seemed forgotten here, each child being known only by her simple Christian name, and all being taught to regard each other as equals.

One bright shining day some forty years ago, during the Easter holidays, the young ladies, tired of play, half separated into small parties, and were talking together in interested conversation, while some sat apart sketching some pretty spot, or absorbed in reading some choice book.

Seated on a rustic bench under a fine old apple tree were three girls; English they were called, though each one represented a separate portion of the United Kingdom, one being English, the other Irish, and the third Scotch. "Only to think," said the tallest of them, "that in less than three months we shall be at home, sweet home! Rouse up my little Marie, and try to realize what three months' time we shall all enjoy freedom, beautiful freedom! The lovely world will be ours to wander about in at our own sweet will; no horrid walls to hem us in, no study bells to spoil all our sport, no spiteful spirits to tell on us behind our backs, but the dear old boys to romp and play with instead, over hill and dale! My heart beats wildly when I think of it; home is as sweet and the world is so lovely! I long to be free like yonder bird." The speaker, a beautiful girl of scarce seventeen, sprang lightly on to the bench upon which her companions were seated, and, seizing a branch of the tree overhead, shook the pink and white blossoms wildly down, and continued, "I cannot help it, but I feel so full of life and fun, and I love the world. O Marie, say you love it a little also!"

Upon hearing this, one of the girls looked up quickly, and replied in gentle tones, "I love my little home dearly, very dearly, but—and the sweet upturned face looked solemn—"I really know so little of the world, and I love our convent home so much that the thought of having to leave it so soon fills me with sadness. You love it too, dear Bertie, and I

know well your warm heart will often ache for the kind friends you leave behind these walls."

"Oh yes, I know it will; but then remember I am not good like you, and I cannot stand restraint. What do you say, Madge? Is there not a magnificent feeling in the thought that you are free to roam about the beautiful world as you like; to gallop wildly on your own pet steed and enjoy the early morning breeze; to race over the downs with the boys, and feel that the birds are not freer than you? Oh dear! it is no use; the more I am kept down, the more I long to break loose. Dear nuns they are too good for me. I often wonder what they see in me to love and be so patient with, considering all the trouble I give them."

"Small wonder," said the same gentle voice that spoke before; "I never found it a difficult task to love you, Bertie."

"Nor I," chimed in Madge. "Why, I positively heard Mère Theresia say the other day, she did not know what she would do when Beatrice de Woodville left the convent; she would miss her so."

This speech was answered by a merry peal of derisive laughter. "Ay, truly, my soul, she will miss me, and will have no merit in her virtues when I am gone. She ought to be quite grateful to me for all the occasions I have given her for practising patience and mortification, to say nothing of charity and forgiveness of enemies. Poor dear old Mère! I love her in spite of all our many disagreements, and I should enjoy taking her to my pretty English home, to show her all she has missed these last fifty years. Oh! wouldn't she be scandalized at the wicked world?"

All three girls laughed, and Madge added, "Well, a glorious day like this does make me long for my bonnie Scottish hills. I often wish I had been a boy, because then they would allow me to climb about our mountains as of old. I think boys have much the best of life. Willie always told me I was a better companion to him than any boy he knew," and she sighed deeply.

"Poor Madge, from my heart I pity you," said Marie, arm stoutly round her friend's waist. "You shall lose your only brother—what should I do without mine?" "Or I without either of mine?" and Beatrice, springing to the ground, dropped upon her knees before Madge, and, taking one of her hands in both of hers, exclaimed warmly, "Dear old Madge! I never hear a Mass but I do pray for your dear brother's soul, and ask God to comfort you. You shall come to see me when you leave school, and we will try to cheer you and make you forget your sorrow. Now," she continued, "I have three will sign sinners, and I will carry a copy, and I will retain the original deed, and it shall be binding upon all of us so long as we are still in the flesh, and able to fulfill the conditions contained in it. Stay, lend me a pencil, and I will draw a rough copy of it even now."

So saying, Beatrice slid down upon the grass, and, resting her paper upon her knee, commenced to write rapidly. Her two companions watched her proceedings with amused expressions, for Beatrice's face now wore a grave and serious look as though she were inditing her last will and testament. Her brows were drawn as if in deep thought, and her fine eyes wandered over the distant hills as though seeking inspiration from objects far away. At last, after repeated dashes and flourishes, she finished, and having read the little document over to her own satisfaction, she arose, and assuming that dignity which so well became her, proceeded to read in clear tones the following, preface it with these words:—

"Listen, daughters of St. Benedict, and tell me if this meets with your honest approval. This is to certify that we three girls—we won't call ourselves sisters—viz., Marie Blaise Margaret Fitzallen (alias Madge), and Beatrice de Woodville (alias Bertie) all three commonly known as 'The United Kingdom,' do herein solemnly declare, that if it be in the power of our mortal bodies to meet together in any place five years hence from the date of this document, we will do so. Of course, if death steps in, the poor victim will be released from her promise."

"Oh yes, indeed; let us have no ghosts tramping about!" interrupted Madge. "I don't care about them!" "Hush!" said Beatrice sternly, and she resumed, "If sickness lays its wasting hand upon any one member of the aforesaid United Kingdom, then the healthy members will go to the abode of that sickly one and console her. In the same manner, if death has laid one unfortunate member low in the grave, then the two surviving ones will meet at that sad spot and pray for the repose of the soul of that dear departed one. No previous engagement will allow any member to break this promise, unless she first writes and informs the others of her inability to fulfil this all-important obligation. Given at St. Benedict's, this 27th day of April, 1858, and signed by each member of the aforesaid United Kingdom."

"There!" said Beatrice, looking down upon her companions; "how will that do?" "I think it will be simply delightful," said Marie, "to meet together five years hence! But you have forgotten something, dear Bertie"—and the colour deepened on her pretty face. "What if one of us should be detained and not able to get away?"

"Oh," laughed Madge, "Marie means what if one of us should be a nun, and forbidden to climb the walls."

"Dear me! I never thought of that," said Beatrice seriously. "Oh, well, then, we must all meet here, just as we are now, under this very tree, and tell our experiences of life; it will be fun! You and I, Madge, will tell little Mère Marie all we have seen and done in the wicked world."

"Take care," said Marie, with a knowing look, "that I may not be the one to come and see you both here."

"No fear," answered Beatrice gaily. "Madge is too easy-going to be a nun; and I—oh, preserve me from such a thing! the very thought of it makes me ill."

Their conversation was suddenly interrupted by the discovery of the presence of a fourth girl standing near. The intruder was another English girl, by name Isabel Johnson. She was rather tall for her age, and dark, with a disagreeable expression about the mouth. She exclaimed in French, with a look of astonishment, "So you are allowed to speak English today, are you?"

"We are always permitted to speak English during the Easter holidays," answered Marie.

"Oh, are we? I was not aware of that. It was only yesterday that I heard Mère Agatha scold Annie and Mary Marsden for conversing in English."

"Well," said Marie, "I am very sorry if we have done wrong. Do you, dear Madge, and Mère Scolastica and make sure by asking for permission. I am certain she will not refuse us."

Madge rose and hurried across the grounds to where the nun was slowly walking with a crowd of girls around her. She was evidently telling them something of great interest, for Madge joined the group of girls walking backwards before the nun, and seemed to forget the errand upon which she had gone. Meantime, Beatrice and Marie resumed their little *to-à-à-à* in low tones, not caring that Isabel should hear all they had to say.

Now between these two girls there existed, as often happens between school-girls, the deepest attachment. Beatrice loved the gentle Marie, so unselfish, so full as she was of tender care and thought for every one. She revered and loved her for all her strength of her strong young heart; and Marie returned that love sincerely. She was proud of Bertie's noble nature, and failed to see the faults in her which some of the girls characterized as pride and haughtiness. As they will make a hasty sketch of them as they sit under the apple-tree in the bloom of their youth. What a pretty picture they make! Both are dressed in the plain black uniform of the convent; but an ornament save their own beauty to set it off, unless it be their pretty white lace collar and cuffs, which give such a distinctive finish to their somewhat sombre costume. Marie is the elder by one year. She is of short rather than tall stature, with a nicely rounded figure, and plump little arms and hands. Her mother was a descendant of a good old Irish family, and was famous for her great beauty. What a pretty picture she would make! Both are dressed in the plain black uniform of the convent; but an ornament save their own beauty to set it off, unless it be their pretty white lace collar and cuffs, which give such a distinctive finish to their somewhat sombre costume. Marie is the elder by one year. She is of short rather than tall stature, with a nicely rounded figure, and plump little arms and hands. Her mother was a descendant of a good old Irish family, and was famous for her great beauty. What a pretty picture she would make!

Beatrice drew herself up with dignity and obeyed. As she retired the sweep of her dress and graceful and light to her graceful form. The last one pleading look at Marie that asked her not to incriminate herself, and walked slowly towards the fine old Abbey.

"Mother, Mother," exclaimed Marie, seizing the nun's hands, and looking earnestly into her face, "dear Bertie was only angry on my account; she could not help it; do please forgive her this once."

"Perhaps I vexed her, but quite unintentionally," said Isabel, turning away. "You know you did," answered Marie, "poor Bertie, and she was trying so hard to be good."

"Well, I am sorry, and I didn't mean it," said Isabel, as she walked away; but she is so fiery if any one looks at you!" Isabel Johnson was not without her good points—she was only as her home training had made her, selfish and avaricious. She had been taught to believe that wealth and position ranked before anything else in the world. Her parents lived up to the principle. "Make no friends unless you can derive some advantage from their acquaintance, either socially or financially." The girl had not been six months in the convent, but she had decided which of her companions it would be worth her while to know. There are some people who seem marvellously gifted in discovering the ins and outs of all their neighbours' private affairs, and to this class belonged Isabel. She soon discovered that to be friends with Earl de Woodville's daughter would be a very pleasant thing in a "lar life, and tried with all her power to attract Beatrice toward her. By some how Beatrice instinctively withdrew from any advance on the part of Isabel, and clung tenaciously to her first and dearest companion, Marie. This inclined Isabel greatly, especially as she felt sure that Marie Blaise was selling under false colours. She had heard rumours that whatever the Blaises might once have been, they were not at all well off now, and she was bitterly jealous of the gentle girl. Alas! she had still to learn that no

wealth could purchase the jewel Marie possessed—the gift of bestowing herself on others; of giving, and counting not the cost. Besides which, Marie had a very large share of that virtue so rare in woman, which throws the light upon all that is fairest and best in our neighbour's character, and so faintly hides the weak points that strangers perceive them not. No one heard Marie speak unkindly of any one; she could generally excuse the intention if she could not condone the deed.

Mother Agatha drew Marie's arm within her own and strolled quietly down a side-walk. "Now tell me everything," dear child; why was Beatrice so angry?"

Marie related with spirit all the details of the glib quarrel; and as she did so, Madge, who from the distance had observed but not understood what was going on, ran rapidly forward, and quietly took her place at the other side of the Sister. Whilst Marie was relating everything in a simple way, Madge interrupted her by saying, "But Beatrice had permission to speak English, for I asked Mère Scolastica for it, and telegraphed the answer with my handkerchief. You did not see me, Marie, but the other two did."

"Poor child! why did she not say so?" said the kind nun. "She has not been looking quite well lately, and I did not like sending her in from the bright sunshine. Besides, it was hard not to feel angry with Isabel for her ill-mannered speech."

"Beatrice never will defend herself," said Madge. "Please do not take from her conduct badge. It would discourage her so," pleaded her little friend. "She is trying so hard to be good. You don't know her as I do!"

"I fear I understand her too well, poor child," and Mother Agatha sighed. "There are few things so hard to subdue as pride; but Beatrice is a noble girl, and I expect great things from her with God's help."

Isabel shall apologize to you both, she resumed; and her speech was most rude and unbecoming. "Don't blame her, Mother!" said Marie kindly; "there is perhaps truth in what she said. Lady de Woodville may not care for her daughter to visit us. You know we are not wealthy now."

"The grand daughter of Lord O'Hagan need never be ashamed to visit with any of her companions!" said Mother Agatha, with somewhat of Beatrice's tone and manner. "There are more in this convent than your friend Bertie who would take offence if they heard the daughter of Mary O'Hagan insulted!"

"Did you know my mother, then, so well?" asked Marie.

"Ay, and loved her too, my child! We all loved her; for she was as good as she was beautiful. We were both from the same country, and I was as devoted to her as Beatrice is to you, and it was by trying to imitate her that I first saved me from myself."

"They walked on in silence, little thinking that Isabel, with an aching heart and burning face, was listening to all they said. The girl had thrown herself upon the grass and hid her face in some shrubs. Her thoughts were bitter; she felt she had lost ground just where she most wished to gain it."

"Why does Marie try and defend me," she argued to herself, "when I almost despise myself? How differently you are valued and judged here to what you are in the world! We have plenty of money but no grand relations with handles to their names. Perhaps that is the chief reason why Marie is thought so much of here. None of the girls must ever find it out, though; but, so far, they have never asked me. Perhaps Margaret Fitzallen comes from a titled family. But no, it is impossible; she has no pretensions about her, and her clothes are quite common looking. Yet Beatrice and Marie are very fond of her; I wonder why? I must try and discover the reason." The trio had moved on, so Isabel was left to her own cogitations.

Meanwhile Beatrice had reached the Abbey. After passing under the last beautiful arch which spanned the broad road, still within the enclosure, she paused. On the right was a little alcove. There, sheltered from the passers-by, hung a life-sized crucifix. The girl stopped under the low doorway and entered. A feeling of shame took possession of her. She stood a moment gazing at the emblem of suffering and meekness before her. Then the proud head gradually lowered; and walking patiently forward, she sank upon her knees, clasping the foot of the cross and hiding her face on its wood.

"O my God, forgive me!" she murmured—in spite of all her promises on Good Friday, I am, upon hearing a few ill-natured words, as bad as ever." She sobbed. "Oh, that I could be humble and patient! I shall lose patience with myself soon."

"Never say that, my child," said well known voices at her side, whilst a kindly hand was laid upon her forehead. "Courage, little one, and tell me what dreadful crime you have been committing now."

"O Father, Egbert! I did not know you were there," said the girl, turning her beautiful face all wet with tears towards him.

"No, you did not notice me," said the old priest kindly; "but come tell me, dear child, what troubles you." He sat down upon one of the whitest rocks of the little Calvary, projecting rocks of the little Calvary, which Beatrice, who insisted upon kneeling to, punish her pride, told him all her fault.

"I have lost the badge now, Father, and cannot be a Child of Mary! My dear mother will be so disappointed in me; but it serves me quite right, I am not fit to belong to Our Lady."

"Poor child, I wish you were not going to leave us so soon; you are too young to face the world. It is your father's wish; he declares he cannot possibly spare you from his side any longer. But have courage, my little one, courage!" and the old man's hands kindly stroked the bright brown hair; "you have a kind, brave heart, and the good God loves you dearly. I have great confidence in our little Bertie—she will never disgrace the friends of her girlhood."

"Thank you, oh thank you, dear Father, for those words! I will never forget them, and may God help me to fulfil your hopes!"

TO BE CONTINUED

ANCHORED

By Joseph L. Shanahan, M. A., in The Missionary

"Why, hello, Ray! I didn't expect to meet you today." These were the words that greeted me as I entered the smoking car. The voice sounded very familiar, an echo, as it were, from the remote past. I turned abruptly around and, much to my surprise, was confronted by the welcome countenance of Francis O'Neil, one of my old schoolmates.

"Well, Francis, I certainly am glad to see you. Let's sit down and talk over those happy hours of youth."

We walked to a remote corner of the car and slouched back into a seat. "Yes, they were very happy," he responded, "even with all their drawbacks; yet what is your opinion now of those long two hours sermons to which we were bonded and of which we had to give strict account at home? Or those tedious prayers which almost taxed the physical powers of our knees?"

"Do you remember," he said, a smile appearing and spreading over his face, "when we were members of Fraser's Memorial Church, in the old town house, with the square wooden pews, with seats that lifted when the congregation arose to pray, and the vigorous slam we gave them when we resettled ourselves? But I believe the worst part of all our religious training was the amount of time we were compelled to spend on the Bible, while our mothers stood guard over us."

"You certainly remember distinctly those early days. I believe I have forgotten mostly all of the Bible that I memorized during my boyhood. But, thank God, I don't need it now. I have given up the private interpretation idea. Yes, I have finally been brought out of that terrible darkness."

"Then you have thrown aside all religion," he inquired, indignantly. "You, an elder of the church, brought up in the midst of Presbyterians, have finally cast aside all religious beliefs. If such is the case, then it is a miracle."

"Not exactly thrown aside all religion," I interposed, "but have become anchored. I have finally reached a safe harbor, to use nautical terms."

"Anchored?" he repeated, with astonishment. "Tell me where you have finally steered your ship after such a storm."

"In a safe port," I replied, handing him at the same time my prayer-book. He scrutinized the pages very carefully, handed it back to me in a sort of disgusted manner. "A Catholic," he uttered, with a shade of what I thought was contempt. "I thought I would turn the conversation his way. 'Where are you wandering religiously?' I asked. 'Men of your age generally become fixed in their religious views, especially when they have passed the half-century mark.'"

"I have gone to the other extreme," he answered. "I don't believe in any religion, any church or any creed. Just believe in God. But you who are a Catholic can hardly sympathize with me, a wandering sheep."

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