

"BONNY KATE," A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

BY
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CHAPTER XI.—(Continued)

The afternoon is at its highest tide of mellow brightness, when the party of equestrians ride out of the gate of Fairfields, several hours later. Kate, as usual, is mounted on Mignon, and Tarleton, as usual, rides by her side; but Mr. Lawrence is on the other side, and there is no opportunity for private conversation, if either were minded that way. In truth, however, they are not. It is enough for them, at present, to be together; enough to talk lightly and



"You'll only make things unpleasant."

gayly of indifferent things, to breathe the soft air, to canter side by side over the smooth road, which winds like a yellow ribbon by the banks of the river.

Southdale is only six miles distant; and six miles, with good horses, count for little. The way has seemed very short to Kate, when Tarleton

Curiosity, more than any need to rest, make the girls accept this invitation. They enter the room indicated, and look round. Since Tarleton's boyhood, Southdale has been rented—first by his guardian, then by himself; consequently, very little of the furniture is by this time in a condition to be used; but all that the ravages of careless tenants have spared is gathered here. It is quaintly old-fashioned. Mahogany tables with elaborately-carved legs, straight-backed chairs covered with faded red damask, a high book-case, and a small piano with the yellowest of keys, which seems listening to itself with amazement, as it gives forth a rattling waltz under Janet's fingers.

"Dear me!" she says, pausing in this performance, "I thought we were old-fashioned at Fairfields; but this looks fairly antediluvian. These household belongings must surely date back to Frank's great-grandfather."

"Very likely they do," says Sophy; "but it is respectable to be old-fashioned. I wish Frank would marry an heiress, and fit up the place nicely. He would make a charming neighbour."

"He would have to go elsewhere to look for the heiress," says Janet, returning to her jangling music.

"Oh, Janet, spare our ears!" cries Kate. "You are torturing us and breaking that old piano's heart with your now-fangled melodies. I am sure it has not heard anything later than 'Auld Robin Gray.'"

"It is asthmatic enough to have been a contemporary of his," says Janet, rising.

Then Kate sits down, and, touching gently the keys over which fingers now dust have lingered, begins to sing. The piano has probably heard such tones before, for there is a strain of half-forgotten melody in its cracked notes, as her sweet, sympathetic voice rises in some tender old words:

"How brightly bloomed the gay green birch,
How fair the hawthorn's blossom,
As underneath its fragrant shade,
I clasped her to my bosom.
The golden hours, on angel wings,
Flew o'er me and my dearest;
For dear to me as light and life
Was my sweet Highland Mary."

She is singing, when Tarleton returns and pauses in the door to listen. By a motion he bids Sophy and Janet be silent; but Kate,



He obediently holds up his hat.

stoops from his saddle to open the gate which leads into the grounds.

"I don't know whether you have been here lately," he says to Mr. Lawrence. "If not, you will find the place much gone down. The last tenant abused it shamefully."

Gone down and neglected though it may be, Southdale is still an attractive place. The house has no architectural pretensions, and, in fact, very little unity of design; for wings, piazzas and bay-windows have been added to the original edifice, until the whole spreads over a considerable space; but it is not unpicturesque, and would evidently prove most comfortable.

"Too pleasant a place to give up, Frank," says Mr. Lawrence, as they approach the front of the building. "Sell the race-horses, by all means, if by so doing you can keep this."

"I have quite made up my mind to that," Tarleton replies, as, having dismounted, he turns to lift Kate from her saddle.

"How familiar everything looks!" says Sophy, who, together with Wilmer, comes up at a canter. "Oh, Frank, what a charming place you could make it again!"

"Yes, with plenty of money," answers Tarleton. He crosses the piazza as he speaks, and opens a pair of Venetian blinds. "This is the only habitable room," he says. "Will you ladies come in and rest, while we go down to the stable and have the horses brought out?"

glancing into a mirror, sees his face reflected, and stops, with a laugh.

"There," she says. "I think the piano knows that."



The expression of his eyes makes her lashes droop. "I am sure it knows it," he says, coming forward. "It was one of my mother's favourite songs. I have not heard it since she sang it."



"I haven't seen a vicious trick in him."

"Was it one of your mother's songs?" asks Kate. "It seems strange that it should have occurred to me; but I am very fond of old ballads."

"Then go on and finish that."

She shakes her head. "I think it is best to leave the lovers with the golden hours under the hawthorn's blossom. The last verses always make me want to cry. Why is it that some words have such power to touch one's heart?"

"Because the heart from which they came was touched, I suppose. Ah, well! to none of us do such golden hours come often. But I have had some of them lately."

Lawrence. "I've been with him six months, and I haven't seen a vicious trick in him."

"Thoroughbreds are rarely vicious," says that gentleman.—"Well, Frank, he is magnificent."

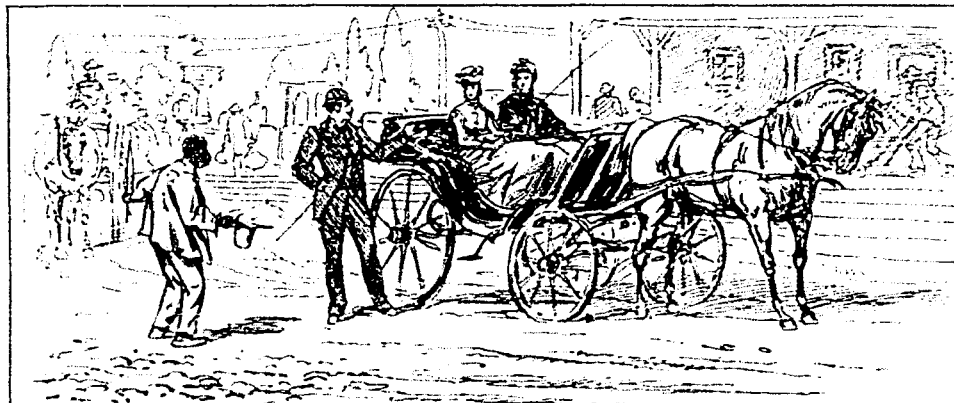
"And his performances are magnificent, too," says Tarleton.

"Since you think of selling him, what do you ask for him?" inquires Wilmer.

"Ten thousand dollars."

"It seems an immense sum for one horse," says Sophy, in an awe-struck tone.

"Not for a horse like this," says Will, walking around and about, and regarding him from every point of view.



"Here is Milton, who will take charge of them."

He looks at her as he speaks, and the expression of his eyes makes her lashes droop, and the colour flicker more brightly into her cheeks—cheeks that never hung out such a flag under all the enamored Mr. Proctor's gazes. There is an instant's pause. Sophy and Janet have stepped to the piazza outside; the soft sunshine slants into the room, touches the yellow keys of the piano, and gleams on the surface of the old-fashioned mirror, which hangs against the wall in a tarnished frame of black and gold. Many such scenes has the old mirror held in its depths and smiled over, but never one which surpassed in meaning that which is here. Their pulses are beating to one accord; the moment, as it passes, is fraught with the culmination of all that they have been feeling for many days; but no instinct warns them that it is one of the critical opportunities of which life is full. Should Tarleton speak now, the future may be all in his own hand; but he does not speak. Scarce ten paces distant, half a dozen people are talking eagerly; any instant an interruption may occur; so, the minute, with all its possibilities, slips from his grasp. Some one calls. Kate, with a start, takes her gloves from the piano, and, saying simply, "We have certainly had some very pleasant hours," moves away.

He follows her to the piazza, where the rest of the party are assembled.

On the turf in front, several horses, held by their respective grooms, are undergoing inspection. They all have the clean limbs, the fine skins, the beautiful heads, of racers; but on one, in especial, the attention of the group is centred. This is Cavalier, famous for his victories on many fields. It is impossible to look at him without recalling those telling lines of Whyte Melville's which Janet has just quoted:

"A head like a snake, and a skin like a mouse,
An eye like a woman, bright, gentle and brown,
With loins and a back that could carry a horse,
And quarters to lift him right over a town."

How shall one by no means deeply versed in equine knowledge, speak of his points! Yet, even to the inexperienced eye, his great powers are evident. In colour he is a rich, dark chestnut, and the oblique shoulders and depth of girth, together with the breadth and muscular development of his loins and quarters, indicate both speed and endurance; while nothing can surpass in beauty the graceful neck and deer-shaped head.

The groom who holds him is answering various questions.

"Yes, sir; gentle as can be," he says to Mr.

"Meanwhile, you must not forget my pet," says Tarleton, walking up to another animal—a beautiful dark-brown filly, shaded almost to black. "She has her reputation yet to make, but I have the highest hopes of her. Her trainer says that he has never known a horse put forth greater power on her trials."

"I have been observing her," says Will. "She is a splendid creature—and pretty as a picture. What do you call her?"

Tarleton stroked the filly's neck caressingly, as he answers:

"I intended to call her Psyche, but I have decided to name her Bonny Kate."



"There can be no possible drawback to my candour with regard to Mr. Ashton."

There was a general laugh.

"You ought to consider yourself highly complimented, Kate," says Will, addressing his cousin.

"Of course I am complimented," she answers, readily, though blushing like a rose—"that is, if Mr. Tarleton really names her after me."

"I should have asked your permission before bestowing the name, should I not?" Tarleton says, looking at her. "But I fancied you would not object to such a namesake."