

"BONNY KATE," A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

BY
CHRISTIAN REID.

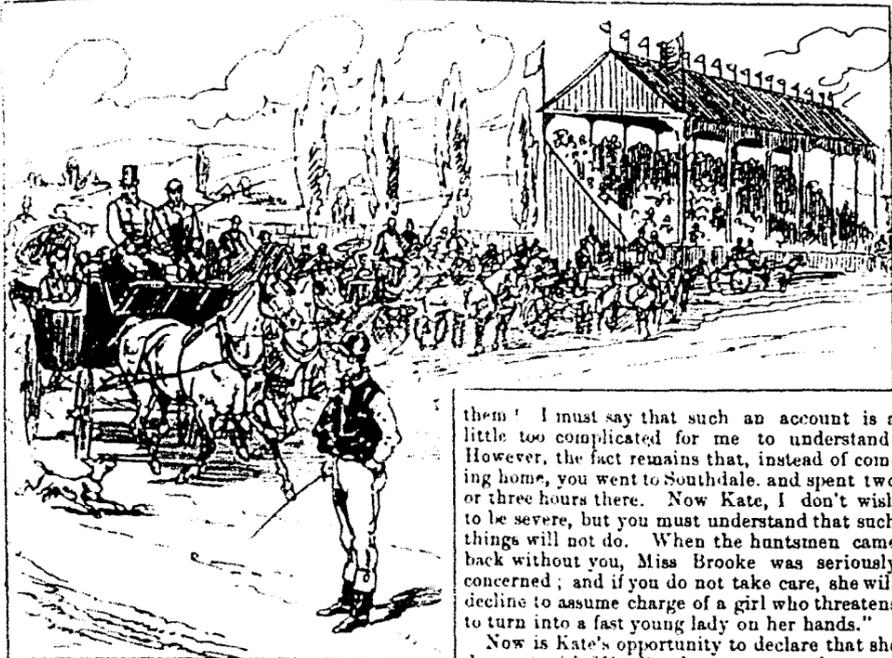
CHAPTER XIX.

"I never could any lustre see
In eyes that would not look on me."

"Kate," says Mrs. Lawrence, "I must beg that you will remember that you are no longer a child. As far as age goes, you certainly should have attained some discretion."

"As far as I can learn, there was no necessity for you to have gone through the creek bottom," interrupts the merciless mentor. "Why should you have followed Frank Tarleton into such a place? Why did you not remain with the huntsmen?"

"We followed the dogs."
"You followed the dogs, and yet you lost



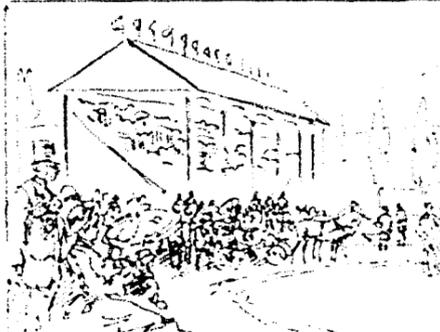
The Carriage enters the enclosure

"I am sorry if you think I have been indiscreet, Aunt Margaret," says Kate; but, despite the penitence of the words, there is the suggestion of an unruly smile about the soft-cut mouth.

them! I must say that such an account is a little too complicated for me to understand. However, the fact remains that, instead of coming home, you went to Southdale, and spent two or three hours there. Now Kate, I don't wish to be severe, but you must understand that such things will not do. When the huntsmen came back without you, Miss Brooke was seriously concerned; and if you do not take care, she will decline to assume charge of a girl who threatens to turn into a fast young lady on her hands."

Now is Kate's opportunity to declare that she does not wish Miss Brooke to assume charge of her; but the words stick in her throat. For the first time in her life she is possessed of a secret, and, in consequence, she feels the blood come to her face in a crimson tide. It is fully a minute before she is able to stammer:

"I—I have changed my mind, Aunt Margaret. I cannot go with Miss Brooke."



"You are always ready to express sorrow," says Mrs. Lawrence; "but I never perceive any signs of amendment. One act of thoughtlessness follows fast upon another; and your escapade this morning has been beyond your usual mark. To leave the rest of the party, and go to Southdale and take breakfast with Frank Tarleton—I am ashamed of you. Do you know that a few more things of this kind, and people will call you 'fast'?"

"But it was altogether an accident!" pleads Kate. "We lost the hounds, and we were dreadfully muddy, for we had been all through the creek bottom—"



A cynosure for all eyes.

"Changed your mind!" repeats Mrs. Lawrence. "You agreed last night to go, after I pointed out how necessary it is that you should do so."

"I know I did," says Kate, dejectedly. "I am very sorry that I should have misled you, but—I cannot go, and that is an end of it."

"That is not an end of it at all!" returns Mrs. Lawrence irately. "Do you imagine that you can vacillate back and forth like this? Why have you changed your mind since last night? What reason have you to give for refusing such an offer?"

Kate hesitates. What can she answer! Surely her aunt has a right to know the meaning of such a sudden change of resolution! Oh, if Tarleton had not sealed her lips! This is what she thinks. What she says is:

"I have no better reason than that I don't wish to go, Aunt Margaret. Please forgive me for making a mistake. I ought to have told you so last night."

"Last night you saw as plainly as I do that it is best for you to go," says Mrs. Lawrence, look-

ing at her keenly. "Kate, you need not try to deceive me. Something has occurred this morning to alter your resolution. What is it?"

Again the betraying crimson flies to Kate's face. Speak falsely she cannot, break her promise to Tarleton she will not. Between the two alternatives, nothing seems left but silence.

"Very well," says Mrs. Lawrence, after a minute. "You will not tell me, but I can very readily imagine what it is. You are suffering Frank Tarleton to amuse himself by flirting with you."

"No—indeed no!" cries Kate, earnestly. "Then give me a reason for changing your mind," says Mrs. Lawrence, inexorably.

"I don't want to go," answers Kate, blushing like the guilty thing she feels herself to be.

"That would be childish if it were true," says her aunt. "Being not true—at least not wholly true—it is worse. I told your uncle what the consequences of bringing Frank Tarleton here would be. Now I shall tell him what they are."

"O Aunt Margaret, dear Aunt Margaret, don't!" cries Kate, with her eyes full of tears. "You are mistaken, indeed you are! You are unjust to—Mr. Tarleton and to me."



Bonny Kate comes to the front

"You must let me judge of that," says Mrs. Lawrence—and putting aside the hand that would detain her, she leaves the room.

Kate stands aghast a moment. Then she covers her face with her hands and bursts into tears. It seems hard to have her happiness dashed with bitterness like this! "Why cannot people let one alone?" she thinks. "Why must they torment and worry one? I don't mean to be unjust—Aunt Margaret thinks she is doing right, but she makes everything so unpleasant! I wish I had never seen Miss Brooke! I wish she had never come here! I wish she had never asked me to go away with her!"

Meanwhile Mrs. Lawrence, breathing vexation if not wrath, has gone to make her report. "Will," she says, meeting that young gentleman in the hall, "do you know where I can find your father?"

"I think you will find him in the library," answers Will. "Where the deuce is my game-bag? I suppose you haven't chanced to see it anywhere?"

Mrs. Lawrence replies that she has not seen that valuable article, and then she turns to the library. As she approaches, the door opens and Mr. Vaughn comes out. He bows, says a few words, and passes on, while she enters the room, where her husband is standing on the hearth looking absently down into the fireplace.

"Margaret!" he says, glancing round. "This is fortunate. I was just coming in search of you."

"And I am in search of you," says Mrs. Lawrence. "I must speak to you about Kate."



"Oh Kate it will never do!"

"Indeed!" says Mr. Lawrence. "Mr. Vaughn has just been speaking to me of Kate."

"I think everybody has gone distracted on the subject of Kate," says Mrs. Lawrence. "Pray what had he to say of her?"

"Only that he wishes to marry her."

"To marry her!" Mrs. Lawrence fairly gasps out these words in her amazement.

"Henry," she says, "are you in earnest?"

"Perfectly in earnest," Mr. Lawrence answers. "But you are hardly more surprised than I was. I had no idea of such a thing."



"Who could have had?" says Mrs. Lawrence. Then a sudden gleam of light seems to fall on her intelligence. "No doubt this explains Kate's conduct," she says. "Last night she agreed with me that it was best for her to accept agree with me that it was best for her to accept



"Read that," she says.

Miss Brooke's offer. This morning she tells me, without giving any reason for the change, that she cannot do so. I confess I was inclined to suspect that Frank Tarleton was at the bottom of the matter; but now I suppose it is Mr. Vaughn."

"Frank Tarleton!" repeats Mr. Lawrence, looking a little startled. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I thought there were strong indications of a flirtation between Kate and himself; and I still do not understand why she should have left the party and gone off in a very improper manner with Frank this morning, if she had accepted—"

"She has not accepted anybody," interrupts Mr. Lawrence. "Mr. Vaughn has not spoken to her yet. He came to me—in a very gentlemanly manner, I must say—and explained his position before offering himself. It seems that Kate's uncle, Mr. Ashton, has expressed his intention of making Mr. Vaughn, who is his nearest male relation, his heir. Not long ago, while visiting the Vaughns, he spoke for the first time of Kate, and expressed a desire—which, like a royal desire, was equivalent, I suppose, to a command—that this young man should marry her. He accordingly came here, and expresses himself charmed with Kate. In the interview which has just ended, he asked my permission to address her. Of course I referred him to her for his answer; but I own to you that it will be a great distress to me if she accepts him."

"Henry!" Mrs. Lawrence can say no more. Words are too weak to express her astonishment



On the box seat of the Norton Carriage.