

THREE DAUGHTERS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

BY MRS. INNES BROWN

CHAPTER XVI.—CONTINUED

"All are busy enjoying themselves," thought the girl; "no one will miss me. Surely I may visit Our Blessed Lord and see Him that, though so merry and gay, yet we have not forgotten Him."

The little white figure flew swiftly along the long corridors, up the easy flight of stairs, and soon stood at the heavy oaken door of the chapel. All was still and quiet here. She paused to recover breath, and by the faint light near glanced once more over her programme.

It was all right. In the dim distance, as it were, she could hear the merry sound of music, and could detect that the same dance was still being prolonged, and yet she had the next one at liberty; then the one after that had a single "R" against it. Marie colored deeply as she realized how often on her card that single "R" occurred.

With both hands she pushed open the heavy door, and then entered the silent chapel. All sound of the music and revelry ceased as the door closed behind her.

It was very sweet to kneel there alone and give and consecrate to God the first moments of the New Year, and the girl felt extremely happy as she prayed earnestly for blessings on all those she loved so well.

How long a faint but certain stream of light fell across the little sanctuary, and Marie felt assured that the door had been opened, and that she was not alone. A tall manly form attired in military court costume moved quietly and slowly up the aisle, then stood with folded arms and burning heart, gazing longingly and sadly at the little white vision before him. On Lord Reginald's face were plainly depicted lines of the keenest misery and suffering.

What right had he to call this fair young flower from God's sanctuary? Had she not given herself entirely to Him? and had He not the prior claim? But why—oh, why—struggle as he might against it—why have she thus willed that his whole heart should have gone out to this girl, as he knew it had done? What was life to him now without her? And yet it must not be. Heaven itself appeared to have raised an insurmountable barrier between them, and he dared not try to force it down. No; he must bear his sorrow alone. "O God, have pity on me!" he murmured, and his head sank lower upon his chest.

At that moment Marie turned her head; she guessed too well who was standing near, and in an imperative yet almost playful whisper she demanded, "How is this, sir knight? You have not yet paid your respects to Our Lady."

Lord Reginald strode hastily to a seat in front of her, but upon the opposite side of the aisle, and dropping upon his knees, buried his face in both hands, whilst big sobbing sobs shook his whole frame. Poor Marie was deeply moved and sorely troubled. She knew instinctively that she possessed wonderful power to soothe him, yet she argued, "Ah! dare I use it? Have I any right to do so?" Her kind heart as usual got the better of her scruples, and leaving her seat, she crossed over to where the young Lord knelt.

"What is the matter, Reginald? Do not fret so. I cannot bear to see it," she said kindly, laying her hand gently upon his shoulder. But at these words the sobs appeared to increase, and she heard him say— "O God, help me! I cannot endure it any longer." He did not look up at her, but took the little hand in his and pressed it to his lips. "Forgive me, if you can, just this once, Marie; but I have to face a life long trial, and, alas! I lack the courage and grace to do so."

will pardon and exonerate me. Then be patient with me. Nay, do not start when I tell you that you, and you alone, are the cause of my lifelong sorrow; for I love and revere you, dearest Marie, with all my heart and soul! Nay, bear with me and hear me out—for Marie had withdrawn her hands from his, and sprung in evident terror from his side.

"Oh, not me! not me! Surely you cannot mean me!" she implored, in accents of unfeigned alarm. "What have I done that you dare to say this to me?" "In justice and mercy to me hear me out," he cried. "God knows how much I have already suffered. Do not add to my burden by spurning me from you thus. Listen. I will never entreat nor implore you to bestow upon me what you deem belongs to God alone. But love you I cannot help, and never shall I love another as I do you, sweet Marie. But oh! if in the years to come you should discover that you have made a mistake; that God has not called you to that high destiny to which you aspire; that He has other designs, other work for you on earth, remember that there is one true and faithful heart who longs for your love, your help, your companionship, who values not existence without you. Remember also that by my side there is work for you to do, that as my wife you could accomplish much, very much, good, and I vow that none other shall ever fill that place."

Lord Reginald said the girl, greatly agitated, "you must not speak to me like this, neither should I listen to you. You have taken advantage of my sympathy for your sorrow, knowing well that had I guessed for one instant the cause of your pain and grief, never should I have desired you to explain it to me."

"I know that full well," he answered mournfully, and you see totally innocent and free from all blame, and yet I hoped that you would forgive me. Have I wounded your kind heart so much and erred beyond forgiveness this time, dear Marie?"

No reply came from the closed lips, nor were the drooping lids raised ever so little, only a deep sigh escaped her, and Reginald gained courage.

"Unknown to you, Marie, you carry about with you this evening a talisman that—had I not known you as I do—might have raised my hopes and given me more confidence. Well I know it was placed there by the hands of a fond parent, who, though she erred in doing so, thinks almost more of my happiness than of her own."

"What can you mean?" she inquired hurriedly. "I wish a talisman of hope for any man?" "That necktie, Marie; it was never yet worn by any one save by the wife or promised bride of a De Woodville. Nay, do not break it," he cried, seeing the girl seize the pearls as though to dash them from her. "They are of great value, and their history is a sad one, for many times have the tears of royalty fallen upon them. Elizabeth, mother of the poor young prince so cruelly smothered in the Tower, presented them to our family."

"And pray is every one aware of the conditions upon which they are worn?" demanded Marie, with some indignation in her tone. "Far from it, I do assure you. It has always been a purely private wish of the family's, and I am sure that both my parents know of but one whom they wish or deem fit to wear them. Certainly I will take them off if you wish it, but continue, neither will I vex nor trouble you more; but remember, Marie, that during my lifetime one alone shall ever wear them again."

He unclasped them gently from her fair throat, and ere he consigned them to his pocket, looked intently at them, and, as though speaking to them, he continued in a low tone: "Many eyes have gazed upon you, some filled with bitter grief, many with heartfelt joy; but never, never again shall mine look upon you until the hour arrives in which you may reappear to me from whence you have but now been spared."

Marie feigned not to hear, but in a troubled, plaintive voice requested to be led back to the ball-room. He kindly but gently drew her arm once more through his, and as they walked along he whispered, "Perhaps before this new year has run its last hours out you may be able to forgive me the indiscretion I have committed during the first few moments of it?"

During the following day Lord Reginald appeared to avoid Marie. She was aware that he did it for her own sake, and tried to feel grateful to him for it; but, alas! his heart was not always under our own control, and it was with a pang of almost scorch that she heard the Earl address him thus on the second evening after the ball— "Are you obliged to leave us so soon, Regie? I am sorry not to have seen more of you, my boy."

"I also am grieved, father, but fear I must go," he answered slowly. "They appear to think at headquarters that my time of leave has already extended long enough. It has passed all too quickly—like a dream, in fact, to me."

Marie felt that as he spoke he turned and looked towards her, but for the life of her she dared not raise her eyes from her book, lest the tell-tale colour should betray her, and convey to him the sorrow she really felt at the news of his sudden departure; so seizing the first opportunity she left the room.

"I shall leave early in the morning, even before you are up," said Reginald a few hours later, as he stood near the door of his sister's boudoir and wished Marie good-night. "Do we part as friends, Marie?" "We do," said the girl in a low tone, raising her eyes bright with tears to his, for she felt she was driving him from his home, and— "I will never forget you in my prayers—never!"

"God bless you now and always, dearest Marie; whether I die in peace at home or on the dreary field of battle, the bright memory of the one pure, good girl that I have met shall ever be my shield and buckler. Farewell, then, until God wills that we should meet again. Once more he gallantly raised her hand to his lips, and with one long last look was gone.

Reluctantly, but forcibly, the girl withdrew her tear-dimmed eyes from the vision of that tall receding form, and turning into her own room, which was in darkness, she closed the door firmly behind her, and groping her way to the window, drew the handsome curtains to one side and gazed with a sigh of relief upon the faithful and steady light opposite.

"Sweet little flame!" she whispered; "more true, more steadfast than my poor heart, you burn with a rare and gentle constancy, whilst strange and contending feelings tear asunder my poor unstable heart! Then clasping her hands tightly together, she cried with passionate earnestness, "Teach me to do Thy will, my God!—Thine, and Thine alone."

Ab, Marie! for the first time in your life you have uttered that prayer without the least thought of feeling of self.

It was Christmas Eve. Charles Roland pushed aside his books. Study was beginning to pall on him. Wisdom is an exasperating mistress, and the ante-chambers leading to her royal presence seemed on that day to be full of a particularly stressful atmosphere. Charles went over to the window and looked out. The snowflakes drifted steadily through the bare trees in the square, opposite his window, and fell softly on the pavement before the house. Two or three poor children, oblivious apparently of the dazzling inducements of the scene, and in spite of their scanty clothing, were talking with childlike earnestness near the open door. One, a little girl, five or six years old, was clasping a tawdriy dressed doll. To the two baby boys by her side, innocent of the mother's instinct to which such ecstasy might be due, who surveyed critically enough the object of her adoration, the two appeared to offer unthoughtful victims of play and pleasure. Charles looked down and smiled. The little scene was not without its humanizing effect; and it brought back to his mind with a rush many things which he had forgotten, among others that it was Christmas Eve. Gazing out at the snowflakes and down at the children playing under his window, he reflected rather bitterly that Christmas held no meaning for him anyway. He was an exile and alone, and to give or to receive presents was a joy he could not hope to share. He had drifted away from family and friends, he had also drifted away from his childhood's faith; yet the thought of Christmas now recalled memories which he could not lightly set aside—recalled the need of human sympathy and human kindness, made him feel acutely the necessity of taking some human being to his heart, or of sharing with some fellow creature that love of his kind which, in spite of all his sophistication, had not quite died out of his heart.

Charles put on his hat and great coat and went out. The children he had watched from the window had disappeared, but he knew other children would be easy to find. The words, "and a little child shall lead them," kept repeating themselves in his mind, without any conscious acquiescence on his part; though he knew himself to be now in search of a little child.

He took the child's hand and they started on a tour of inspection of the shops. He was altogether indifferent now about meeting his fellow-students or anyone else. The child looked as if she might really be a cousin or any kind of conventional relative. The young man felt proud of his little companion; she, still prouder of her newly found protector, bounded gaily by his side, chattering unceasingly all the time, as if the bliss of the occasion needed an overflow of words.

Her imagination had evidently never strayed beyond the merest necessities of life, or such luxuries as a few pence could procure. Charles' generosity appeared to her the wildest prodigality, and she sought to restrain him. Only on one point was she exacting—that of the doll, which was to be her own particular possession; a doll with blue eyes, a pink dress, and yellow hair. The exact shade of the hair presented a difficulty; but at last she was fully satisfied.

"And it's my own—my very own, forever and forever! And Marie is not to take it away from me!" "No; but Marie must have something, too—something for herself. What would she like?" "Marie would like a book—a big book with lots of stories in it; and then she can read the stories to me. Oh, it'll be lovely!" "And you will let her play with your doll sometimes?" "Yes, pwaps on Sundays after catechism, and nights when we have a fire. Den we's awfy good and quiet, 'cause mother goes to sleep."

The book was bought, and some other things—for mother and father, and Aunt Louise, and even the baby. At last when Charles and his little companion had entered their purchase, he asked her where she lived.

"Oh, it's not far from the church! Won't you come to see me when you come on Sundays?" Charles did not tell her that he did not go to Mass on Sundays or any other day; but she seemed to have some misgivings on the subject for she repeated her invitation.

"Yes, I'll come to see you. But you must go home now." She saddened visibly, and trotted on in silence by his side. "Everything stops," she said at last. "I want something that keeps on all the time. Dees things stop up in heaven, too?" "You mean do things come to an end in heaven? No; in heaven things last forever and ever."

"Don I want to go to heaven; and I want you to go, too! Don't you want to go to heaven?" Charles blushed and hesitated. "I believe I do now for your sake, girlie."

"And you'll come to the Crib tomorrow! Oh, it's lovely! Lots of ligats and flowers and things! And the little Infant Jesus—oh, He's so wunful! You'll come to see Him, won't you?" They had reached the dingy street, and at the door of one of its poorest houses the child stopped. "I live here, up at the top of that big house where you see the clothes drying in his window."

"Then I must say goodbye here, but I'll come to see you." "You'll come soon—very soon? And you won't forget the Crib tomorrow, will you?" He transferred the parcels from his arms to those of the child. She could hardly hold them all. As he stooped to kiss her, her eyes filled with tears. "I'll come very soon," he promised. "And you'll come to the Crib tomorrow?" "Yes, perhaps—" "Say really, truly!" "Yes, I'll come."

She brightened at once. "The little Jesus will give you lots of presents," she whispered. "I'll ask Him, 'cause I's got nothing to give you any more!" He watched her toiling up the dusty stairway of the wretched house. Halfway up she turned to call a last adieu; and he saw her sweetness—a flower fresh from the hand of God, blossoming in the midst of decay and dirt and ugliness. And he thanked Heaven for that flower which seemed to have sprung up along life's dusty highroad just for him.

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you know an idea has entered my head this instant to make your material program the best in the city. You know Dr. Johnson, of Wheeler street? Of course not, he came here only a month ago. His wife is a beautiful singer, in fact a star of the first magnitude up to three years ago when he married her. Possibly you know her as the famous Alice McCaffrey."

"The queen of song?" Father McGee frowned at the prospect. "The same, known in all the civilized world." "And you think she would sing for us?" "Undoubtedly, if I ask her. She and I were classmates at Notre Dame and bosom friends for years."

"She is a Catholic then?" "Nominally so. I fear the practical faith is weak. Dr. Johnson is enormously wealthy; you know—is an avowed atheist, a sort of iconoclast, an anti everything, and I fear that Alice has borrowed many of his ideas."

"Hardly a suitable person to sing at the Mass—do you think so?" "I know Father, but then—if may stir up old memories. Who knows?" "True, Mrs. Dillon. Dear me, what a providential lady you are! Always ready when you are needed most. See Mrs. Johnston if you will. We'll have the finest music in the city."

And so it was agreed that Mrs. Dillon would ask the celebrated singer to assist in saving from destruction the musical efforts of a poor parish priest. She felt that she had a good cause to plead, and without a fear of defeat she drove immediately to the grand home which the doctor had built for the happiness of his celebrated wife. As she sat in the reception room awaiting the entrance of her old friend she could not help contrasting the oriental magnificence about her with the humble little cottage in which Alice McCaffrey had grown to maidenhood, and the simple rooms of the convent of their school days. In the wildest of her dreams she had imagined an ending so romantic, so luxurious, and tonight when her mind was upon music, Mrs. Dillon could fancy the rich rooms transformed into the exhibition hall on that fair graduation day when Alice had sung like an angel and won the plaudits of an outside world. She remembered how happy Alice had declared herself, and how she manifested her intention of returning after vacation to enter novitiate. The dear Sister, smiling at her impulsiveness, had said: "It may be different when you see the world, poor child. Sometimes I tremble for you—you are so beautiful, so talented." Alice had laughed at the Sister's fears, and then—Mrs. Johnson entered the room.

"Jesie! You have returned my call at last! One feels doubly a stranger when one's friends are almost next door and remain there." "A thousand reasons, Alice, for such apparent neglect. And yet I wonder what you will say when you know my errand."

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BARRISTERS, SOLICITORS

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By MATILDA SERAO

Catholic Record

LONDON, ONT.

ALICE McCAFFREY

A CHRISTMAS STORY

Father McGee was worried. His usual cheery smile had given place to a troubled expression, especially evident at this season of Christmas.

Mrs. Dillon noticed it immediately when she came to him to get the names of the poor whom she was to make glad at this joyous time.

"You look worried, Father," she said, as she was about to go on her errand of mercy.

"Dear me, and it is so evident? Indeed I am worried, and yet to you it may seem a trivial matter. It's about our Christmas music. You know the price I have taken in the parish—ad how hard we worked at it, and here at the last moment most of the singers are sick, and it's too late to get others, and so on. And that's my trouble; not as bad as a fire or an earthquake, but bad enough, and the people are so used to a beautiful program at Christmas."

Mrs. Dillon smiled. "I'm so glad that no greater trouble is impending. But about your music. Do you know an idea has entered my head this instant to make your material program the best in the city. You know Dr. Johnson, of Wheeler street? Of course not, he came here only a month ago. His wife is a beautiful singer, in fact a star of the first magnitude up to three years ago when he married her. Possibly you know her as the famous Alice McCaffrey."

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