

THE LOVE STORY OF ALISON BARNARD BY KATHARINE TYNAN

CHAPTER XVIII.—Continued.

Alison went home after her visit to the convent, very full of the work, and of the concession she had obtained, fuller still of the clue she had come upon so unexpectedly. She had to put her thoughts of it away till she was alone, since Mr. John and Mr. Peter Bosanquet were to dine with them. Over the dinner she gave them and large-eyed Tessa an account of her afternoon and how it had been spent, excluding only the matter which she considered privy to herself. She had not yet reached the point of intimacy at which she would speak of "the trust," to those two old friends of hers, though once or twice she had been on the point of doing so rather to her surprise. The two old men were interested; they had not known of the existence of Mount Carmel so near to them; as Ballycushla, though in the Irish towns round about there were many convents of an earlier date. The embroidery too, they must see the embroidery. What a good thing that it was to be taught to the workers round about! As for the postulants who never came, they were sympathetic over that, although, said Mr. Peter, with the greater freedom of the born Catholic, there was no doubt that Mount Carmel and its like were out of date. The ancient church was adapting itself into modern ideas and needs. "What is the good," he asked rhetorically, "of living in the fifteenth century when God has placed you in the twentieth? The contemplative orders are out of date."

other and a beatific expression on his face, listening to Tessa playing Irish melodies. "So you are going to turn Maurice Tyrrell into a business-man," she said. "It will be the making of him. His mother is at once sad and delighted." "We like the young fellow, and we believe he will suit our purpose excellently." Alison already knew of the proposed big business undertaking which was to bring the lonely stretches of bog and mountain into touch with the markets of the world. "I believe you are right," she said, "although it took the eye of genius to discover it. You have not yet heard of a place you would like to buy. I hope when it is discovered that it will be within driving distance of Castle Barnard." "It must be within driving distance of Castle Barnard," Mr. Peter said with emphasis. "No, we have heard of nothing although we have searched all the agents' books. I don't see why we shouldn't build. I believe it will come to that in the end." "It seems a pity to build when the country is so full of old mansions going to ruin."

"Supposing the Bill should not pass?" said Mr. John, gently. "That is something we do not contemplate. The Government may have to go to the country upon it, but its big battalions will return little diminished, if at all. The Premier is sure of it. The bye-elections show the way the wind blows. Our men are coming back with increased majorities." "We have lived longer than you, son," said his father, "and we have seen big majorities crumble. However, we will hope that the bill will become law. If the Government should go out over it, and the Opposition comes in!" "We should be out of work for some years," the young fellow said, in a startled way. "It would be a great hardship if Sir Gerard was to see the Department his hands created pass from his hands into the hands of someone without his ideals. Yet it would not be a party question. The work of the Department must be conducted on some such lines as his. It is purely ameliorative." "His position should be a permanent one," Mr. Peter said. "It ought not to depend on the ebb and flow of English political tides. But if the people were disappointed how would they take it?" The young fellow shrugged his shoulders. "Heaven knows," he said. "Who is to answer for the people? I hope they would remember his unselfish devotion to them. He has surely lived down despair and dislike." The three were sitting at the round table of polished mahogany at which they had dined. The cloth had been removed, and the fruit, and wine in its coolers of old Sheffield plate, left on the table that shone like a mirror. Paul Bosanquet sat between the two elder men; their faces beamed approval on him. All three were silent for an instant. Each had been talking about the things they were grossing in themselves, were outside a matter of more intimate concern. Mr. John and Mr. Peter looked at each other. Then the father spoke. "My boy," he said, "your uncle and I have learned to love the lady of your choice, of whom you spoke to us last summer. We hope that things will go well with your love. When will you speak to her?" "At the earliest possible moment." The boy laughed innocently. "It has been hard not to speak before, in a sense. I wanted you to know and to love her first."

"Make her happy; she is a dear child," she said. "And when she has said yes to you I shall have something to tell you." The something was the story of Castle Barnard and the French Wife. That suggestion of Mrs. George Barnard, which her spouse had mocked at that Alison intended Tessa to follow her at Castle Barnard had actually taken possession of Alison's mind. She was not likely to marry indeed, unless she had first made restitution. She could not marry any man who took her for the mistress of Castle Barnard, and was not satisfied that she should regard herself as only a trustee. It was a possession, that few men would be willing to see pass away from themselves and their children. There was one, perhaps, but he was alleged to a course, which made almost as tangible a barrier between them as his marriage with another woman would have been. It was well that Tessa was going to marry a rich man. If the day came when she was forced to give up Castle Barnard, if indeed she was willing to take in trust, it would not be so hard for her. They were at the end of the picture gallery together. At the other end were Tessa and the two old men. Mr. Peter, casting a glance towards where the two stood by the fire, saw the hand-clasp and murmured a thanksgiving. Prematurely as it happened, for Alison was beside them in an instant. She had something to show them, a little raw colt, brother to Mavourneen, born that morning. They must come to the stable yard and see it. Her look included Paul and Tessa, but when she had swept the two old men away with her, Paul and Tessa lingered behind. "So unfortunate," Mr. John's eyes telegraphed to Mr. Peter. "It is all right," Mr. Peter looked reassurance. Had he not seen that close and tender handclasp? They inspected the little colt already standing up by his mother on four slender, shaky legs, and pronounced him a beauty. "I think of forming a racing stable," said Alison. "That will be a new departure," said Mr. Peter. "A becoming one, I hope," said Alison. She often had a playful air with those two dear old men. "As though anything could misbecome Miss Barnard," Mr. Peter retorted, bowing low. "My father kept race-horses at one time," Alison went on. "I confess I want something in the nature of a diversion. I love the creatures, and shall delight in rearing them. What would you suggest for my racing colors?" She was not sure how much she was in earnest, but she had not been born in Ireland for nothing. It was true that the sporting drop was strong in her. "Your husband must have the selection of those," said Mr. Peter, gravely. "For some inexplicable reason Alison blushed, and the old men looked at each other delightedly. "A racing stable," she said, recovering herself, "is the diversion of a single woman. A racing-stable and cards; it is the provision against dullness for old age in the country. I am glad I do not share Ballycushla prejudices." Mr. John turned away from the contemplation of the colt. He and Mr. Peter had acquired the tastes of country gentlemen during their years in Surrey. As a rule they were very glad to inspect Alison's farmery. "The Berkshire boar is outgrowing his house," said Alison. "You must positively see him. I shall either have to sell him or have some planks taken out and his house enlarged. He has improved so much since you persuaded Brady to keep him clean."

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