

OUR BONNIE.

A ROMANCE BY HERBERT OAKBURNE.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. DOUGLAS' DECISION.

LAWYER Wormage was a shrewd man. All Rustleton said so. And whatever Rustleton said was sure to be right. It was now three months since Bonnie's departure and I had not heard a word of or from him. It seems, however, that Jonas Wormage, Esq. knew more than some other people. We are privileged to take a peep at a scene in Laurel Villa, the residence of Mrs. Douglas. Time, 11 a. m. *Dramatis personæ*: Mrs. Douglas, aunt of Boniface; J. Wormage, Esq., family solicitor. Wormage *loquitur*.

"Well, you know madam, as I said before, I should only advise you for the best. Mr. Douglas is young and foolish, he has not learned what life is yet, and ahem!—when he has been a little longer in exile—ahem! if I may so speak, madam, he will begin to wish to return, and you will again begin to find your—ahem!—hospitality besieged."

"Yes," says the lady, "but don't you think it would be well to give him the opportunity of returning at once? I myself now——"

"By no means, madam, it would be doing an injury to your own position as well as completely spoiling his nature. Let him have his fit out; let him learn to sigh for the comfort of a home—ahem!—like this. Besides, you forget, my dear madam, that he is adverse to all your kind arrangements for his future, and you cannot bring him back without encouraging his wilfulness. Pardon me for speaking so plainly, but I feel, as the old—ahem!—friend and adviser of your noble—I think I may say noble—family, that in order to act my part—ahem!—honestly and thoroughly, I must keep you informed of all that goes on."

"Certainly, Mr. Wormage, you do quite right, but I would like to know if you are absolutely certain about what you told me of Mr. Douglas's position towards—towards that young girl you mentioned—who ——"

"Absolutely, madam, and I am a man of honour—ahem!—I assure you."

"Who, I think you said, was in the habit of meeting him in a clandestine manner—a fair young woman—by-the-bye, who is she?"

"I have good authority, madam. She is a teacher or governess in a school or something of the kind, but I'm sure *that* would make no difference to Mr. Boniface, who is honourable enough to court and

marry—ahem!—a sweep's daughter, even. I beg pardon, ma'am, but you were going to say something!"

"Merely that I am disgusted with my nephew's carryings-on, and shall be pleased if you will call in at your early convenience to perform the little duty you advised. Will the day after to-morrow suit?"

"With pleasure my dear madam, or I should say, with regret, for Mr. Douglas is a well-meaning young fellow I've no doubt. May I ask if you have decided to transfer the property to your lady-friend, that—ahem!—I may get matters forward?"

"That is my decision."

And here Mrs. Douglas leaned forward to touch the bell, and her visitor bowed himself out.

Still she sat thinking. The time came before her when Bonnie was entrusted by his father, her husband's brother, to her care. Could she be said to love him less because she had banished him—for a time of course? It would do him good, prove rich experience; but what were those stories the lawyer had told her. Could it be that the only male representative of their family in England was about to bring disgrace upon the name? She shuddered, and drew her chair nearer the fire. Was this the end of the hopes and ambitions to adorn the name of Douglas? Had she not better follow the course she would have followed had she never had a nephew? Thus musing she fell asleep, and did not wake until a servant came to tell her luncheon was ready.

CHAPTER III.

"QUIT YOU LIKE MEN, BE STRONG!"

Fancy will go a long way with some people. They can imagine that to live in a wealthy city is tantamount to living in luxury and comfort. But facts differ from fancies, as Bonnie found out. Still he was not a fool. Born of a Scotch race he had within him something of that "cannyness" and common-sense which, whilst enabling the possessors to discern between what is worth having and what is not, helps to make one more prudent than one would otherwise be.

And so he found himself humble lodgings in a little street which runs out of that thoroughfare of violin-shops—Wardour Street—a neighbourhood where the houses are poor and dirty, and the inhabitants have the appearance of miserable, broken-down wretches, where one's sense of smell is constantly favoured with all the essence of Soho perfumes, and where filthy dogs, costermongers' half-naked children, and barrel-organs predominate. Why should he, being a gentleman, content himself with such an abode? It is not for me to say. But I would suggest that, tired and hungry as he was the night he arrived in London, and finding clean apartments—for they were decent—to let, and a kindly old dame in charge of them, he had given way to first inclinations and made himself at home in Church Street.

This morning he had received a letter from the only individual he had cared to correspond with since his arrival in the metropolis. If you could have glanced over her shoulder who penned it, have watched the sweet expression of her face as she rapidly darkened its pages with

ink, have seen those bright grey eyes sparkle at every sentence, those ruddy lips moving in tender prettiness as she murmured each word she wrote, you would not have failed to recognise one whom you have only seen once as yet; a "fair white form." We may as well benefit by a peep over *his* shoulder.

"MY OWN BOY,—I have felt ever so lonely since you left, and there has been *no one* to take me upon the river except Dido, and he can't row. When are you going to send for me? I met your friend Miss B. last night; she looked very majestically upon me, at least so I thought—but then you know how sensitive I am—and passed on. If she only *knew*; but she doesn't. Do you think she would remember that time when we nearly smashed (what a distinguished word for a young lady to use!) her father's boat? Oh! here is Dido putting his paws up and wanting me to go for a walk, and I can't for I have to write to you, and then do 'heaps' of work. Do get on and come back soon. I look out for your letters every Tuesday. I do believe the postman is getting to know your writing, for he actually smiled last time, and said 'Another for you, Miss!' Mamma thinks I ought not to write so much, but then she doesn't know the good cause I write for. I sometimes think it would be better if I told her *right out*. Oh dear! there goes that horrid bell, and I shall have to leave off writing to my darling for to-day, and go and 'teach the young ideas how to shoot' as you used to say. Good-bye till next time. Oh! I forgot, that dreadful man, Lawyer Wormage, called in the other night. Fancy! He pretended he wanted to know about one of the children's parents, but I'm sure he was after something else. He stared so, and nearly frightened me.

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"Your loving NELLIE."

Somehow the letter did not exactly please him. Hastily swallowing his breakfast he hurried along Oxford Street, through Holborn, and down Fetter Lane. Up a little Court was the publishing office of the *Social Gazette*. Here Bonnie came every morning to write letters for, and in other ways assist Henry Durant, the proprietor and editor. This was the position of the man that was to "live by literature"! Do not sneer at him; for work is honourable, and idleness a disgrace. Six weeks ago he came to the editor of the *Social Gazette*, asking to be taken on the literary staff. Mr. Durant looked at his cuttings of original articles, smiled and said that he feared there was little hope for him, but if he had any business capabilities there was a vacancy for an amanuensis; would he care to accept an offer of 25s. per week, there was not much to do. Another might have turned up his nose at this, but our Bonnie was a sensible lad, took a day to think over it, and accepted the post.

The next day being Sunday, in the afternoon our hero took it into his head to go to Westminster Abbey. He had often meant to pay a visit there, but had never been yet. As he strolled along the gravelled walk in St. James's Park, watching the leaves as they drifted from the trees, his thoughts became more and more serious. Why should he feel so sad this afternoon? . . . Cheer up, man, it is the day of rest.

It was a warm autumn day, and in the old Abbey the air was soft and cool. The sermon was a good one, but lengthy. The text was "Quit you like men, be strong!" which, after Bonnie heard, his interest awoke, and he listened with earnest attention. But soon the preacher's voice grew monotonous and indistinct, and slumber seemed inevitable. He ceased, and the crowd arose. Bonnie sat on thinking. . . . half asleep . . . pondering on the words he remembered. . . . Be strong! Suddenly it seemed that a soft strain of harmony arose; the voices of the choir blended in heavenly sweetness. . . . "God is a spirit." . . . Bonnie sat up and listened, his whole soul filled with rapture. This was better than any opera or concert. Then swelled those notes in glorious fullness, and ascended, clasping the mighty pillars, and appearing to hover in the bright sunlight that streamed through the dusky windows far away near the roof. . . . "God is a Spirit." . . . The building was surely now being made Divine, and the highest Himself was present. Bonnie rose in wonder and gladness. As he did so he caught sight of a face near the entrance; a woman's face, flushed with radiance and pleasure. Her blue eyes turned on him, and then the cheeks whitened and the lips parted. Who was it? . . . Borne out by the crowd he found himself standing on Westminster Bridge looking at the river and at the sun that was fast sinking into the west, one blaze of splendour. Why should he have felt gloomy? If he had a true purpose in life he must succeed. . . . perseverando! . . . why not write to the fellows at home . . . and Nellie . . . he would always be faithful, and she —

A man tapped him on the shoulder. "Excuse me, but you must come along with me."

"You, why—what is it? Who are you?"

"I am a detective from Scotland Yard, you had better make no resistance."

Here the stranger produced a pair of handcuffs. Bonnie stared in surprise and put his hands behind him. . . . Quit you like men, be strong. . . . "I don't know what you want," said he. Just then a carriage passed, a lady and gentleman in it. That face again!

(To be continued.)

"TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE."

Thou must be true thyself
 If thou the truth wouldst teach;
 Thy soul must overflow, if thou
 Another's soul would reach.
 It needs the overflow of heart
 To give the lips full speech.
 Think truly, and thy thoughts
 Shall the world's famine feed;
 Speak truly, and each word of thine
 Shall be a fruitful seed;
 Live truly, and thy life shall be
 A great and noble creed.

H. BONAR.