

## OUR BONNIE.

A ROMANCE, BY HERBERT OAKBURNE.

### CHAPTER VI.

#### PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND SUSPICIONS.

MR. STURGE, I found, had been called to town unexpectedly that morning, so I did not see him. Mrs. Sturge, I was told, was an invalid, and had to be left at home in charge of her elder daughter. Jack Sturge was a jolly fellow, standing six feet high, and wearing a bit of a beard. He would be about twenty-five years of age. As soon as we had grown a bit friendly he asked me to have a pipe with him, as no one else would.

"Don't, Mr. Oakburne," put in Miss Lilian, "it's only poets and madmen that smoke those horrid things."

But Jack meant to get me over to his side, so I yielded and we remained together philosophizing on the merits of the weed, whilst the others chatted away by the window.

When strolling on the beach I managed to get with Bonnie and talk over matters a bit. "Now," said I in a fatherly-brotherly sort of a way, "what are you thinking of doing as regards future prospects; have you paved the way for something in case you lose your fortune?"

"My dear old boy," he replied, "I've almost given over thinking about it. I haven't heard a word from my aunt since I left Rusleton, and from what Fairmount has told me, I have reason to believe that I am disinherited."

"Nonsense," said I, "the lady wouldn't be so hard as that, about such a trival matter too! Has Frank been divulging 'shop' secrets then?"

"No, not exactly, but he says that a relative of mine has let some 'jolly girl' in for a heap of cash, and he wishes he could get an introduction."

"Have you any idea who it is?"

"No, but I should think it is a young lady my aunt formed the acquaintance of when she was lying ill at Hastings last year. I never saw her, but Mrs. D. continually spoke of her as 'that dear angel,' and was always suggesting that she should come and visit us and that I should keep my eye on her, etcetera. And when I demurred,—What! marry anybody! she came down on me, said she'd a right to suggest, and besides the 'dear angel' had plenty of money, was a rich tallow



factor's daughter, or something of the sort; bah! luckily I left before I met her."

"Still how do you know but what you might have been smitten——."

"Exactly. I saw her miniature in my aunt's best Sunday brooch and was *not* smitten. What d'ye think of that, sir."

"Humph!" Pause.

"What's old Sturge," said I.

"Dunno. I don't ask inquisitive questions."

"But in common sense——."

"Well, he's something or other of a merchant, has an office in the city, does a little on the Stock Exchange, is always talking about Russian affairs, so I suppose he has some investments——."

"Russia!"

"Eh! what's the matter?"

I stopped short, and he turned and looked at me. Putting my arm in his, I said quietly, "Young man, now don't be alarmed, but did you ever learn Geography when you went to Rusleton Grammar School?"

"Why, what in the name of fortune do you mean?"

"Simply this, did you ever learn in what part of the world the Russian empire lay, what was her population, what were her chief cities, what her rivers and mountains, and lastly but not least, what her products and exports?"

"Hang it, I don't see your drift."

"I wish to know a few of the exports."

"Oh! well, wheat, flax and leather. Will that do?"

I laughed. "An excellent memory. Go on."

"Ahem! Potash, Tallow——."

"Stop! Have you heard that word before?"

"Tallow, mysterious man, what do you mean?"

"I mean that Mr. Sturge talks about Russian affairs because he is interested in them, because he deals largely in the exports, and because——."

"I see! because he is the tallow-factor forsooth! But why should your perceptive faculties light upon Mr. Sturge, pray?"

"Simply because I recollected when you said something this morning about the Sturges knowing of you in Rustleton, that Miss S. when she wrote to me in *re* the burglary business hinted some acquaintance on the part of one of their family with Mrs. D."

"Phew! then do you think that Lil——."

"No, she has a sister."

"Yes, one *I've* not seen, and supposing she is like—like——."

"Like Lilian you would say. And if so you would fall in love with her instead. I thought you were not charmed with the miniature!"

He stared full at me, and then changed colour.

"What do you know," he said.

"That you are at present in love with Lilian Sturge, but now that you know your money is likely to go to her sister, you would prefer to make love to her instead."

"Never," he cried.

"But the thought struck you," said I. "Come!"



"Perhaps, but never again. I love now, but——."

"But what?"

"A great deal, but what am I to do?"

"Do? Common sense should tell you that when a man falls in love with a woman he knows it is either a light or a serious feeling. If the former, he thinks little about it; if the latter—well, he generally goes further."

"Splendid reasoning, my Plato! but suppose a man is in love with a *girl*?" I eyed him slowly from head to heel. "Call yourself a man?" said I, smilingly.

"Well, hang it, what did you call yourself when you were twenty-one?"

"A youth, sir! Man is experienced, has seen the world, can battle with life; a youth is vaguely struggling upward, has much before him, and is still green and fickle."

"Do you presume——."

"I presume nothing, you are head over heels, shall I say, in love with Miss Lilian. Good. She is four or five years younger than you, and consequently has four or five years less experience. You have possibly been in love before." He winced and stuck his hands in his pockets.

"One generally knows one's own mind when one is of age," he said.

"Good again, grant that you do. She has the sentimental period of life before her, and may probably find someone she will love better. Besides you have no proof that you have not a rival. There are plenty of these about, I've no doubt. London life means society."

He started and then smiled sorrowfully.

"I may have rivals in due time, but she is too young yet; there is the difficulty, she does not see things as I do, and if I commenced to talk sentiment, she would laugh at me. She has not learnt to love as I love." He spoke passionately.

"I believe you," returned I, "and if you would have her love you, you must teach her. A woman who is to be won must first be wooed. And there are many ways of wooing." Just then we saw the other three advancing towards us. "Please give me my mackintosh, Mr. Douglas," said Lilian, "a shower's coming." And then we hurried in.

The shower proved to be a thunderstorm, and so we sat round the window and watched the lightning playing with the waves. As twilight closed in, the storm ceased, and then Jack, opening the casement to admit the evening breeze, politely requested his cousin to favour us with something on the piano. Unlike those apparently utterly nervous and scrupulous maidens, who are not in "good form," or "have a cold," or would "rather be excused," Lilian rose at once and seated herself at the instrument. "What shall I play," said she. No one replied for a moment, then Jack broke silence. "The audience is content to leave the arrangement of a programme to the principal performer." She had buried her head in her hands as if thinking. Suddenly her fingers touched the keys and sounded a prolonged chord. Again another. And then as if they were a mighty flood of ocean



waves rolling and tossing upon the sand, the notes followed one another in a weird and grand strain of harmony. Higher and higher, reaching to the stars, grasping at things unearthly and unseen, then lower and lower, touching the heart, sinking in sadness into the soul. I noticed our hero rise and lean over the piano to listen, at the same time looking with delight at Lilian. Softly, in perfect time and sweetness, the performer ended her task.

"Oh! what a glorious thing," exclaimed Jack's sister, who had hitherto remained very silent.

"What was it Lil?" cried Jack.

"Guess."

"Impossible."

"Well, I don't know myself."

"Ahem! coming out as a composer, eh! Shall I name it for you?" cried Jack.

"Not at all," she answered, "it was an old piece of German music I bought at a bookstall."

"Sounds like Chopin, don't you think, Mr. Oakburne; or what do you say, Douglas, you ought to know?"

I admitted my inferior judgement, and Bonnie smiled.

"Don't you see, Mr. Oakburne," cried Lilian, "Jack's only making fun, I don't believe he knows a note of music?"

"Excuse me, young lady," said that person, "a poet is allowed to be, and always is, of a melodious turn of mind; now I wouldn't mind proving that."

"Do Jack, there's a good boy;" and turning over the music she produced a song, "here's one of your sort!"

The "one of his sort" turned out to be "Tom Bowling." So Jack, poet and philosopher, was obliged to become *à la* Sims Reeves, Jack the tenor. "I really cannot sing," said Jack meekly.

"You must now," said his sister, and so we had him at our mercy. I can't say much for Mr. Jack's voice, but his expression was all that could be desired, and the beautiful ballad proved as effective and touching in his rendering, as though we had been listening to a St. James's Hall "Star."

"I am very fond of that song," said Bonnie, as Jack sat down, "it is one of the finest ever written."

"A great deal of one's liking depends on the circumstances under which one first hears the song," said I.

It was midnight when we broke up the party and went to bed.

*To be continued.*