

## Choice Literature.

CAROLA.

BY HESHA STRETTON.

## CHAPTER V.—SEEKING HER PARISH PRIEST.

Carola did not tarry for any longer conversation with the old Jew, but passed swiftly on down the spiral staircase, and out through the shop-door. It was like leaving some quiet and peaceful sanctuary—for the lonely garret had been full of holy companionship to her these days past—and plunging into a wild world of debased and wretched life. The summer evening was close and thunderous, and the narrow streets were crowded with people driven out of doors by the heat. The heavy atmosphere was laden with foul sickening smells, in spite of the nearness of the river, or partly, it may be, in consequence of it. Children were crying, women quarrelling, and men swearing. Carola felt a strange sense of repugnance, almost amounting to terror, as she passed through the familiar scene. It was as if she had been away into the kingdom of heaven, and had been thrust back to hell.

There were numbers of people anxious to speak to her, for she had been missing ever since the day of the funeral. There were young men, too, who had been watching for her to appear again, to exchange with her more of their low, rough jokes and their half-savage attentions. But what change had come over Carola? Her pretty face was pale and grave, and her feet went swiftly on their way, as if she was deaf and blind to her old acquaintances. Was this the romping, hoydenish hussy, whose tongue had been so sharp, and whose spirit had been so bold among them as long as they could recollect? If George Bassett was here, he would not let himself be kept at arms' length as they were.

Carola sped on as if she was passing through fire. She looked neither to the right hand nor to the left, for there was no one here who could help her to find the parish priest, or would if they could. But presently she came upon streets where she was not known. An elderly policeman was sauntering along on his beat and she ventured to ask him.

"Parish priest?" he repeated; "perhaps it's the rector of St. Chad's you mean. You go down yonder street, round the corner, till you come to a big church. The house lies just behind it, in a corner of the old church yard."

It was with a trembling hand that Carola lifted the great knocker on the Rectory door, and let it fall with a single yet loud rap that made her heart leap. It was answered instantly, and she entered a large square hall, with benches set on two sides of it, on which some women were seated, waiting for their turn to see the busy Rector. She watched them go into an inner room, and came out one after another, until she herself was called in.

The Rector was an elderly man, with a worn and over-worked look, but his eyes met Carola's gaze with an expression of very benevolent interest, which deepened somewhat as he saw how young and eager was the face of this new comer. She had lost her tremulousness in her earnestness, and she did not wait for him to speak to her first.

"Are you my parish priest," she asked, "as I ought to come to?"

"What parish are you in?" he inquired, with a kindly smile, full of encouragement to the eager girl.

"Oh!" she cried, with clasped hands, "I don't know nothin' about parishes; and I don't hardly know nothin' about a priest. There were wicked priests as had my Lord crucified; but you couldn't ha' been one of them, I'm sure. P'raps you knew some of them though, and I want to know all about it. I want to go to a good school and learn everythin'." Spose you aren't my parish priest, you could tell me to a good school."

"Where do you live, my girl?" he asked. "There's sure to be a school near your home."

"Oh! I must get away, right away," she said, almost sobbing with eagerness. "I couldn't live there any longer now I know what my Lord was like. He wouldn't like me to stay there. I want to learn about Him, and the disciples, and Mary Magdalene, and all the men and women as went about with Him. There's such a many things I can't understand, and nobody to tell me. And I wish to do everythin' exactly as He wants me, so as to be ready when He comes back again. Oh! I shouldn't like to miss doin' anythin' He wanted done."

Little by little Carola, standing before him, with her grave young face growing brighter as the Rector listened so attentively, told her story to him, and showed him the wonderful book, which had held her captive ever since her grandmother's funeral. The Testament was so old a book to him that he merely glanced at it in her outstretched hand, and with almost a shock of disappointment she put it back into her pocket.

"Do you mean that you never heard of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ before this?" he asked.

"Never!" she replied.

"Nor of God Almighty?" he continued.

"Oh, yes!" she said; "but He is the Lord God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob; and this is my Lord. I've kept all the ten commandments ever since I can remember; but I was as miserable as the rest of them, almost; and that made me take to drinkin'. But now I can't live any longer among folks as drink and swear, and steal. I want to get away as far as ever I can, and live with folks like John, and Peter, and Mary, and Martha, and all of them. I don't mind what place it is, so that the folks are like them in my book."

"That would be a place hard to find," said the Rector to himself.

At length he sent Carola away with a promise that he would come himself the next day, and see how true her account of herself was, and speak to Matthias Levi of her desire to go away somewhere into the country.

It was quite dark when she reached home again, and the streets were a little clearer. But she rushed into the little shop, where Matthias was watching for her on the door-sill,

as if it had been a city of refuge; so fearful was she of being caught and held by one or other of her former comrades. The face on which the light of this lamp shone was radiant with hope, and a gentle smile of inward delight lit up the swarthy features of the old Jew, as he followed her up the narrow spiral staircase into his living-room.

"I've found him," she cried, standing with her foot on the lowest rung of the ladder, and panting before she went up into his garret. "I've found my parish priest, and he's a good man, and he'll come and see you to-morrow. He's goin' to find a place in the country for me, where I can learn everythin', and where the folks are good, and don't drink or swear, or do anythin' bad."

"That 'ud be a good thing, Carola," said Matthias.

But his heart felt very heavy as he brooded over the news when Carola was gone. To lose her would be like losing sunshine and eyesight both. It was all the joy he had in life to see her coming and going through his rooms, and to listen eagerly to every word she spoke whenever she chose to stay with him a few minutes. But he had of late been very chary of making any claim upon her time or affection, lest she should grow to hate the wrinkled old man, who tried to exercise any authority over her. The girls of her class would not brook any restraint, and he had left her as free as the air, but he was bound to her. Every word she spoke to him, and every sign of love or trust she showed was a priceless treasure to him.

He awaited with deep anxiety the arrival of Carola's parish priest. The title had conveyed but little meaning to him; but as soon as he saw the Rector of St. Chad's he knew at once that he was one of the hated ministers of the despised Christian race among whom he dwelt. He felt towards him as much repugnance, mingled with dread, as some mild Christian trader might feel towards a heathen magician, who wished to take from him one of his dearest possessions.

"You are a Jew, I believe," said the Rector courteously, standing just within the little shop, in which there was but bare standing-room.

"Yes," replied Matthias from his cobbler's bench. "I'm a Jew."

"And a young Christian girl is dwelling here under your roof," he went on, "and I presume under your guardianship. Is she any relation of yours?"

"No," he answered. "I'd give all I had in the world to make her one of our people, but she isn't. She the granddaughter of a man, who once did me a great service, and his wife and Carol have lived in my attic for many a long year. Carol was born there, and she's never lived any where else. I suppose as she isn't a Jew, she'd be called a Christian. All the folks about here are Christians."

He glanced out into the street with a look of contemptuous pity, and the Rector sighed deeply as he also looked at the open vice and misery that were but too plainly to be seen.

"Yes, the girl ought to get away from here," he said, "and I have thought of a school in the country that would exactly suit her case. It will be far away from her old haunts and companions. I understand she has some money that would meet the expense, or partly meet it?"

"Who says she has any money?" asked Matthias. "We're poor folks, just look around you, sir. Do we look like rich folks?"

"It was the girl herself who told me so," he answered. "She says her grandmother told her on her death-bed that there was nearly a pound a week for her, and that you took care of it and would pay it to her."

"Has she anything to prove it?" inquired Matthias, casting down his eyes, for he felt as if the cunning of this question bordered on dishonesty and falsehood.

"Not that I know of," answered the Rector, who, in fact, had been very doubtful of the truth of Carola's statement.

"She has only the word of an old woman who drank all day long, and wasn't in her right senses," pursued Matthias. "She can't go to that school if she has no money, I suppose?"

"No," said the Rector, "but I might get her a place as a servant."

"How much money would it take?" he asked.

"At least £40 a year," was the answer, "for it would not do for the girl to have any holidays and come back here. She would be quite unfitted for living here again."

"She would never come back," said Matthias, almost with a groan. "She'd never live here again, and I should see her no more, no more for ever."

There was a profound sadness in the old man's tone and manner; but the Rector was thinking too exclusively of Carola to notice him. Though if he had noticed him he was so much accustomed to think of all Jews as cunning and avaricious, that the sadness would only have aroused his suspicion that there was some money in the question.

"I must think it over," said Matthias finally, "and I'll send Carol to you when I've decided what I'll do."

## CHAPTER VI.—DOING JUSTLY.

It was a troubled day and sleepless night that the old Jew passed through after the Rector's visit. Carola's fate seemed left in his hands. It was true that he had charge of about £1,500 which Carola's grandfather had intrusted to him, and which was invested in the Consols under his name. The circumstances under which it had been intrusted to him were suspicious ones. There had been a clever robbery effected in one of the Midland Counties, and old John Fielding had been so far mixed up with it that it made it full of danger to invest such a sum in his own name, or in that of any of his family. Matthias Levi was well known to him, and was under some obligation to him, and so firm was his trust in the Jew's fidelity that he had placed the whole sum in his hands, and made him trustee of it as long as his wife lived. The trust had been faithfully discharged throughout the lifetime of Carola's grandmother, who was the only person acquainted with the circumstances. There was no bond or paper of any kind in existence; and the secret was now entirely in his own keeping.

All day long and through the night Matthias turned the

question over and over in his bewildered and sorrowful mind. If the old grandmother had but lived a few years longer, till he had found a Jew to marry Carola? But now, should he let her go, she would certainly become one of the despised and doomed Christians, losing thereby her dubious chance of being regarded worthy of the future fate of a Jewish woman. Might she not have gone whither Sarah, and Rebecca, and Rachel had gone? For Carola had never been baptized; but if she went among Christians they would baptize her, and she would be lost to him for ever! That was the sting of it. To be lost forever! In this world and the next! All the bonds of morality taught in the ten commandments would be loosened in her, for were not the besetting sins of the Christian drunkenness, blasphemy, and theft, and vice, such as made him shudder as he fancied Carola being plunged into it? No, he could not let her go among the Christians.

But then there came the conviction that he could not keep Carola if she chose to go. She had already outgrown her childhood; nay, many of her street companions had lost their girlhood, and had entered upon a hard and wretched womanhood. The strong, free spirit of the girl would not submit to his control. She would leave him if her mind was bent upon it, and go away into this terrible world of Christians, penniless and friendless, if he did not remain her friend. That would be too dreadful.

And if he took advantage of his secret, and withheld from her the money that was rightly her own, how could he himself lift up his head before the Judge, by whom actions are weighed? There was a passage in the Hebrew Bible, heard many long years ago, but as keenly in his memory as if he had listened to it only a few hours ago—"What doth God require of thee, O man, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" He had loved mercy, and walked humbly with his God; and now the temptation had come to do unjustly, was he to yield to it? Would it be doing justly to keep this money from Carol even for a time?

When he had put up the heavy bar on his shop-door at night, as carefully as if he dwelt in some country where Jewish homes are assaulted and sacked by the mob, he went to his old desk, and from a secret drawer took out a worn and yellow paper, that was all he possessed to represent the sum of money invested in the Consols. There was no name on it but his own. He was a poor man; his love of mercy had stood in the way of his enriching himself. But these hundreds were indisputably his; no person in the whole world could question his claim to them. He did not really covet them. If Carol had remained with him he would have rejoiced that they were hers. But they would separate her from him altogether. To go to that school would unfit her for this place, so the Christian priest confessed. But if she went away penniless, as a servant, why then his old house would be the home to which she would turn in any hour of difficulty or distress. Moreover, she would discover how cruel Christians were to friendless and penniless folks; and she would perhaps come back altogether, glad to find a refuge in the dwelling of one of God's own people. The last thought was one that sorely tempted him, and would not be driven away from his troubled mind.

He could not bring himself to speak to Carola till late the next day. It was the beginning of the Sabbath, which, now the summer was come, began at a late hour; and Carola came down out of her garret to light his lamp and prepare his evening meal. She was too careful to wear her heavy black dress in the house, and she was dressed in the shabby patched gown which had been her best before her grandmother died. Her face was pale and wistful, but there was a tranquillity and sweetness, a look of happiness in it such as he had never seen there before. He watched her in silence as she went softly about his room, his whole heart yearning in unspeakable tenderness towards her. He felt almost as if she was dead, and he was mourning that he had not done all he could to make her life with him happier.

"Carol," he said, in a tremulous voice, "do you want to go away and leave me?"

"Oh, it's not that!" she answered gently, with tears in her eyes, "but I want to learn all I can about my Lord. You know all about your Lord God, and you say your prayers to Him, and keep His Sabbath and His laws; and I want to do the same, and learn what my Lord would have me do."

"Who is your Lord?" he asked in a voice more tremulous than before.

"The Lord Jesus Christ," she answered in a low yet joyous tone.

The blow fell heavily. Already, then, she had been drawn away and enticed into the fatal worship of the impostor! All his hopes withered, as if a hot east wind from the desert had suddenly beaten upon them, and scorched them. He closed his eyes, and saw his beloved one whirled away from him in a raging torrent of sin and misery. He had done his utmost to save her, and all had been in vain. An unutterable anguish took possession of the old man's soul; and he hid his face in his hands and groaned aloud; then he felt Carol's laid tenderly on his shoulder, and heard Carol's voice speaking softly in his ear.

"Oh, and he was a Jew like you!" she said, "only He was the Son of God—your God! and he came to save us all, not the Jews only. And the priests had Him crucified; and he was buried, and came to life again, and went up to heaven. I have read it all in a book. You never knew it, or you'd have told me, I know. For you thought your God didn't care for folks that were only English, and not Jews. But my book says, God loved the world, and sent His Son to save all the world. I'll run and fetch the book, and read it to you: for it's all in English, only I can't understand it all."

If any one had been pronouncing his sentence of death, Matthias could not have shuddered more to hear it than he shuddered at hearing these words from Carola's lips. The blasphemy of them pierced through to his inmost soul. He lifted himself up from the seat into which he had fallen, and there was the terrible calm of despair in his face and voice as he looked steadily at her.

"He is the accursed one!" he cried, loudly and sternly.