

Our Story.

BARBARA STREET.

A FAMILY STORY OF TO-DAY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "OUR NEEL," "A SAILOR'S DAUGHTER," ETC. CHAPTER XVI.

HESTER had seen Mr. Denston many times after this, before the day when he paid his call at No. 47, for the time came when he was allowed to leave his room, and though by that time his nurses were relieved from their duties, and Hester resumed the instruction of Kitty, yet she frequently went across to spend the afternoon with Miss Denston, to whom it was a great boon at this time to have a third person in the shape of this docile, sympathetic girl, who would read aloud, or write at dictation, or do anything that was wanted in the way of attention to the invalids. And how readily and willingly was the attention paid to the one to whom Hester felt she owed reparations for so many hard thoughts, how quickly she perceived his wants, and how prompt was the quiet response they received! And Philip Denston was confirmed in his new views concerning the nature of woman-kind, and told himself how just it was that he should thus be put to shame by the very girl whom he had taken to be an exemplar of the feminine vices he abhorred, and yet who, when need came, proved herself capable of a veritable enthusiasm of humanity. When one morning, after the doctor's visit, he had buttoned up his great coat, and the landlady, full of good nature, opened the front door for him, it was natural that all his thoughts should tend towards the house over the way, where lived the only real friends whom he could call his own. He walked down the steps very slowly, being full of tremors, which were half due to the wondrous exultation, too strong for his weak frame, which he felt at once more finding himself on his feet, with the fresh air blowing about him. He crossed the road, and looked up at the windows. They were trim and bright, as usual, with their red curtains and glossy evergreens in pots. He knew the look of them well from the outside, but with the inside he was not so familiar; and it was that he made up his mind to go in. He had no qualms concerning the welcome he would receive. Constitutionally suspicious of strangers, once won, he was not the man to doubt his friends, and he felt now as confident as Waterhouse himself might have done. Now Hester, unseen herself, had seen their visitor from the window, and the sight moved her, not to run and open the door for him, but to shut herself up again in the back parlor, where she had a moment before left Kitty, in order to fetch a book from the front room. She told no one of what was coming, but Kitty saw that her teacher's face was red, and wondered what had made Hester angry. Then came Denston's knock, in answer to which, Hester heard Grace go to the door. When they saw each other, Grace and Denston both thought of the first and only previous occasion when, an absolute stranger, Grace had opened the door for him. They had not spoken to each other since, yet they hardly met now as strangers.

"You are out," exclaimed Grace; "that is good." She did not shake hands with the visitor, but put her hand lightly on his arm, as if he were a child, and drew him in. "Come in and see my mother; she will be so glad." And soon Denston found himself in the midst of bright faces and congratulations. Mrs. Norris gave him her own chair, and stood looking at him as one proud of her own handiwork, and Waterhouse came down the stairs, two at a time. This sort of thing is very pleasant to a convalescent, who generally finds he has recovered for a time the childish disposition to be pleased or hurt by trifles. Denston was all the more touched that such experience was new to him. His eyes showed everything a little misty. Still Hester had not come forth from her retirement. Grace wondered very much, but presently opened the door and said—

"Why, Hester, do leave your rule of three. Here is Mr. Denston, and only two of his nurses to make jubilation on."

Hester rose and came forward then, offering her hand to Mr. Denston with grace.

"I am very glad to see you out," she said, "but Grace must remember that I have seen you many times since your recovery, and have offered my congratulations before."

"I wonder if Hester could ever be enthusiastic," thought Grace, wondering, and then she introduced the shyly retiring Kitty, who stared large-eyed at the invalid who had turned upside down the small world in which she lived.

Denston, noticing this, felt bound to make some remark, so, remembering to have seen the little girl in a corner the evening he had come in for the first time, he observed—

"We have seen each other before, I think." But the remark, though amiable enough in itself, did not conciliate Kitty, for the appearance and manner of this new acquaintance did not please her as those of Waterhouse had done. His eyes were not the right colour for his face, she reflected with distaste. He looked so ill that perhaps even now he might die, which idea frightened her, so she said—

"I don't know," not quite knowing to what an admission of acquaintance might lead.

"Why, Kitty, I am sure you have," laughed Grace. "At any rate you might tell a little fib rather than hurt Mr. Denston's feelings after he has been so ill. Might he not, Mr. Denston? But oh! I am afraid I have given you a handle for saying, 'So much for a woman's morality!'"

"No, no, Miss Norris," broke in Waterhouse, "Denston is cured of all that nonsense."

"Indeed!" said Grace demurely, "have you cured him?"

"Not I, but the fellow would have been incorrigible if your mother had not done it."

Denston and Mrs. Norris looked at each other, and smiled in a way people have between them when there is good understanding.

"What did you need to be cured of?" asked Mrs. Norris.

"A boyish vice, Mrs. Norris, which I had not kicked off with the rest of them. Waterhouse might have had the grace not to mention it under present circumstances."

"But really, Denston," went on Waterhouse, "how on earth could you expect Kitty to recognize you? Look in the glass, and I defy you to recognize yourself. I am bound to say I think something should be done. Why not go off to the Isle of Wight with me? I am tired of town. What is your opinion, Miss Kitty? Might not his looks be improved from your point of view?"

Kitty, having been abundantly upheld in her previous expression of opinion, and being now under the protection of Waterhouse, made an emphatic rejoinder.

"Yes, I am sure they might."

The general laugh that followed covered a little awkwardness, for Philip Denston had flushed up, disliking a suggestion which involved the question of expense, and knowing Waterhouse's tendencies on that point.

"At least, you will not think of going back to work till you are quite strong," said Mrs. Norris, anxiously.

"I have not spoken to Dr. Black about that yet," said Denston, uneasily.

At this point Grace relieved the conversation from the embarrassment which threatened it.

"Mr. Denston," she began, "have not you a message for Charlie Potter? He asks after you every day over the back wall. He is always painfully and cheerfully hopping about the back yard, looking after the rest of the children, poor little soul! Why shouldn't you come and see him? Do; it would be such a pleasure for him, and so amusing."

Grace, though on amusement bent, had yet a provident mind, and had rapidly surveyed the probability of finding a back garden with or without drying linen before giving the invitation.

"Won't it tire you out much?" asked Mrs. Norris.

"No mother," said Grace; "a convalescent must have his mind amused, and I am sure the Potter children will do that. Come, Mr. Denston!"

"May not I come, too?" said Waterhouse, who had listened with a rather depressed countenance. Grace laughed.

"Oh, dear me, no! The Potter babies wouldn't be induced to speak a word," said Waterhouse, in some indignation; "it's clear you have never seen me with a baby."

However, Grace was obdurate, and Waterhouse could do nothing but retire to his own rooms in dudgeon, and observe Grace and Denston from the back window. He did not exactly approve, in spite of Denston's invalid condition, of the semi-affectionate manner in which Grace treated him, though, as he told himself, it was quite maternal. No detail escaped him of the few minutes they stayed in the garden. Grace looked merry and sweet, and the Charlie Potter affair was evidently a success; and she plucked a sprig of London-pride and presented it to Denston, with mock formality. When they came in again, though Waterhouse perceived that Denston was going, he allowed him to do so, without the ceremony of leave-taking.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN INVITATION.

IT WAS NOW the middle of May. In Barbara Street that fact was in no way perceptible, though in the increased warmth of the weather, which even after the throwing off of superfluous coats and wraps, was by many of the residents considered too great for comfort. This time of year always brought to Grace a vague suffering. She grew thin and strengthless without visible reason; it was always supposed that the spring did not suit her. But the fact was, also, that she felt a longing for the country. She was always beating her wings against the city bars. The scent of the dusty lilacs and chestnuts in the Chester Road gardens, the yellow-tressed laburnums, the view of the distant tree-crowned northern hill, the branch of hawthorn carried by a waggon and bringing into London streets the vision of country lanes—any of these things meeting her on a sudden turned her heart sick. And she had not, we must remember, that annual visit to the sea, or to the mountains or green lanes, so dear to the average Londoner, to look forward to. The Norrises never went out of town, through the green spring, the baking summer, or the bright-leaved autumn. All the seasons came and went, and all alike were spent in Barbara Street, till one would have thought the girls, under the pressure of such monotony, would have grown up with characters as flat and colourless as grass grown under a stone. But Grace's character was of that elastic sort that will rebound from any treatment, and her force served for herself and Kitty too. As for Hester, she had suffered under it, her nature being one that needed some stimulus of enjoyment and of change of scene and society for its right development. She had not an original fund of good spirits and energy, such as Grace had, to preserve her from falling into a morbid habit of mind, at once self-absorbed and self-repressed. Such stimulus and such good result we have already observed in Hester's recent experience. So happily had the objective interest forced on her worked that it had for the time quite dwarfed her personal sorrows and grievances, which had but just before grown to giant proportions. But with a girl of Hester's nature, whose inward drama was so keenly personal, and her experience so slight, feelings and interests were not likely long to remain objective, and already a strong personal tinge had come into those so lately brought into her life. As the days passed and the strong interests of the present more and more usurped the fading impressions of the past, Hester almost entirely lost sight of the family mystery which distressed her. This obliviousness was aided by the fact that since that morning that seemed now so long ago, when Mrs. Norris and Grace had gone out on their solitary expedition, nothing had occurred publicly to bring up the matter again, and as the family life jogged on week by week exactly as it had always done, it began to seem an absurd effort of imagination to suspect the existence of mystery hidden under such a humdrum exterior. Still, there had been facts, and facts are difficult matters to dispose of. So whenever the matter occurred to Hester, she dismissed it with a sigh, feeling with a kind of relief that more acutely personal matters had pushed it on one side for the present. Poor Hester! she felt herself alone in the world, without one person to sympathize with her or comprehend her, and that is a desperate feeling for any human being, young or old. Her relations with the home-people, the same outwardly, had lost now even the imperfect confidence which they had once possessed. In them she could not seek refuge now when her girlish idol had been overthrown, and she needed a refuge so sorely. Her feelings lost their first bitterness towards her mother and Grace, but their want of

confidence in her had raised a barrier which she could not over-pass. Between Grace and herself Hester observed with wonder that this barrier seemed to be tacitly acknowledged, though at the same time Grace had never been more gentle and affectionate towards her, or Hester more responsive. Only in one direction did a glimmer of light, faint as yet, and never yet acknowledged in her own consciousness, shine upon Hester's path at this time. A mere speck of light it was, but glimmering out of the darkness surrounding her, it had a singularly illuminating effect. Under its influence a new look began to come into Hester's face, which had been formerly that of one who expects nothing, hopes nothing, and fears nothing.

A fortnight had passed since Mr. Denston's first visit to No. 47. He was slowly winning his way back to health. But of return to his work there could be no question at present. The doctor would not allow the subject to be broached, and there was a general opinion, not, however, professedly shared by Denston himself, that the doctor was reserving some very serious ultimatum in the matter. Denston certainly, during this period, made the most of his privileges as an admitted member of the Norris' circle. Mrs. Norris had given up her attendance upon him, and now, in turn, he came to see Mrs. Norris every day, and they all so heartily sympathized with him in the dull days he spent over the way that, whenever he came, he was made welcome, which was no more than commonly kind. One day, on a warm and radiant afternoon, when even Barbara Street itself took on an air of cheerfulness, Denston, calling on Mrs. Norris, found that all the family were out. Waterhouse being at home, he went up to see him. The two men treated each other exactly as of old. Waterhouse was friendly and impetuous, Denston cool and taciturn.

"Where are all the family?" asked Denston.

"I don't see why you expect me to know," replied Waterhouse, walking across the room, and pushing up his hair with his hands. He was clearly out of temper.

"You are more likely to know, since you live in the house."

"Do I live in the house? It seems to me you live in the house a good deal more than I do."

Denston lifted his eyebrows, and, in spite of having received no invitation to sit down, took a seat by the window and looked out in silence.

"Why," continued Waterhouse, "I never see any of them in the house; when they go out I certainly have the privilege of beholding their backs. I am sure I don't know what I came to this place for. By-the-by," suddenly changing his tone, "Hester's growing handsomer; don't you think so?"

Waterhouse came nearer to Denston, and sat down on the edge of the table.

"She is very handsome," said Denston.

"Well, I never thought so till lately. She is too impassive to please me."

"I don't think her impassive. I have experienced extraordinary kindness from her."

Denston spoke with unusual warmth, and the slightest flush was perceptible on his pale cheek, due to the effort he had felt himself called to make on behalf of justice. Waterhouse regarded him curiously, and began to draw conclusions. "Ah," he said, "well she always looks me up in the street, you know, I fully regular, admirably well. But, after all, Maud discovered a heart, and of a very dangerous sort too."

"Take care of yourself, then," said Denston, with a somewhat uneasy laugh.

"Oh, I," said Waterhouse, with a lingering intonation, which meant quite as much that he had other fish to fry, as that his friend was more likely than he to fall a victim to Hester's charms. It struck him with the illogical surprise we all feel sometimes, when we find the world unconscious of our internal movements, that Denston should contemplate the possibility of his being attracted by Hester.

"Don't you know," replied Denston, pursuing his own thoughts, "that we poor wretches on one hundred and fifty a year or thereabouts have no hearts? By a merciful provision of nature we have an organ composed, I imagine, of indurated muscle to take its place."

"Nonsense," said Waterhouse, starting up. "You fellows have a far finer chance than we humdrum rich ones. Don't you know that romance, love in a cottage, and all that sort of thing, tells immensely with women? A man with money is heavily handicapped, I can tell you; that is, if he wants a woman worth having." And Waterhouse began to pace up and down. Denston broke into a laugh.

"Well, comment me to that for a paradox! Find me the woman who out of two men would not pick the rich one. Women are the true gold-diggers, all the world over."

"There you are again," broke in Waterhouse, "with your affected cynicism—for affected it is, and you know it."

"Well, perhaps so," admitted Denston, with a faint smile. He had in reality been so occupied with a certain recollection that he spoke out of mere habit, and, as it so happened, in contradiction of his very thought at the time. "By-the-by," he continued, "Miss Grace down-stairs is a woman who would bear out your view of the case."

Waterhouse wheeled round suddenly.

"H?" he exclaimed.

"I say Miss Norris expresses herself remarkably strongly on the desirability of poverty, and the superiority of poor folks."

"Oh, indeed!" remarked Waterhouse, in a neutral tone, the while feeling himself stabbed in a very vital part.

Denston, feeling, perhaps, some slight embarrassment in the air, pulled out his watch.

"I wonder when some of these people are coming in," he said, looking out of the window.

"They went out in a body some three hours since," said Waterhouse.

"Why did you not say so before?" asked Denston, in some surprise.

"Where was the use?"

"What do you say to strolling out on the chance of meeting them? They must come back soon, I should imagine."

Waterhouse walked away from the window.

"I don't think I much care to do that."

"All right! I'll go by myself."

But he was only half-way down the stairs before Waterhouse changed his mind and followed him, for it only took that length of time to bring him round to a laugh at himself, with a dash of contempt in it, for his resentment of Denston's success with his landlady's family. He followed Denston down-stairs two at a time, saying to himself, "If my nose is to be put out of joint, I would rather this fellow performed the operation than any one else."

(To be continued.)

Sabbath School Work.

LESSON HELPS.

SECOND QUARTER.

JESUS THE BREAD OF LIFE.

LESSON X, June 6th, John vi., 23-40; memorize verses 27-29.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Lord evermore give us this bread.—John vi., 34.

TIME.—April A.D. 29. The day following our last lesson.

PLACE.—Capernaum, on the north-west shore of the lake of Galilee.

CIRCUMSTANCES.—This lesson follows naturally after the last, being the instruction Jesus gives the multitude, with the feeding of the 5000 for a text and object lesson.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.—22 The day following: the one in which the 5000 were fed. 23. Howbeit, other boats: this is said to show how the people came across when it had just been said that no boats were left. 26 Not because ye saw the miracles: not for the teaching of the miracles, but for the benefits they obtained from them. 27. Labour not: do not make the wants of the body the chief end of life. The meat which endureth: the food of the soul, that gives it life, that enlarges and strengthens it, and satisfies its immortal wants. Hath the Father sealed: attested as his son and sent from him with the true message. Sealing to the ancients was like signing the name with us. 29. The work of God that ye believe: faith is the source and fountain of all good works. 31. As it is written: Ps. lxxviii., 24. 32. Moses gave you not: it was not Moses, but God, who gave the manna (Ex. 16.). They implied that Moses had done what was more wonderful than Christ, for he fed many thousands 40 years with sweet manna. 35. Never hunger: with pain, and unsatisfied desire. But only as in the Beatitude. 37. The Father giveth me: the divine side of salvation, life, desire, new hearts, come from God only. 39. Raise it up again: at the resurrection. Death should not destroy those who believe.

SUBJECTS FOR SPECIAL REPORTS.—The meat that perisheth.—The bread of life.—The work of God.—What is it to believe.—Moses and the manna.—How Jesus is the bread of life.—What this bread does for us.—v. 37.—"Raise him up at the last day."

LEARN BY HEART vs. 33-35, 37-39.

QUESTIONS.

INTRODUCTORY.—What two miracles of Jesus did we study in our last lesson? Where were Jesus and his disciples then? To what place did they go?

SUBJECT: THE BREAD OF LIFE.

I. SEEKING THE BREAD OF LIFE (vs. 22-27).—Why did the people wonder where Jesus was? Where did they find him? What question did they ask him? What did Jesus say was their object in seeking him? What should have been their motive? What answer would Jesus give them? What is meant by "the meat that perisheth"? Why should they not labour for this? Does this mean that they are not to work for anything to eat? (2 Thess. iii., 10-12. Rom. xii., 11. Eph. iv., 28.) What is the "meat that endureth unto everlasting life"? Why should this be the chief object of their labour? How were they to obtain it? What is meant by "him hath the Father sealed"? Why is v. 23 inserted in the narrative? How would you reconcile v. 26 with v. 14? Is it better to seek Jesus with a poor motive than not to seek him at all? Why should they labour for what Jesus gives them? (v. 27.)

II. FINDING THE BREAD OF LIFE (vs. 28-35).—What question did they ask Jesus? What did he say was the work of God? Show how believing on Jesus is "the work of God." What proof did they ask? Why did they refer to the manna? What three marks of the true bread are mentioned in v. 33? Who is this true bread? How is Jesus the bread of life? Did the people imply that Moses was a greater prophet than Jesus? How did the feeding with manna compare with the feeding of the 5000? What is the food of the soul? How does Jesus feed the soul?

III. EATING THE BREAD OF LIFE (vs. 35-40).—What did Jesus promise those who came to him? How do you reconcile this with the Beatitude in Matt. v., 6? Is coming to Jesus the same as believing on him? What promises do you find in these verses? What is God's will for those who believe on Jesus? From these verses and v. 54 what do you learn as to the meaning of eating the bread of life? What two parts in salvation do you find in v. 37? How can believing in Jesus give us everlasting life? When is the last day? What is raised up?

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

I. The true purpose of life is that which belongs to the soul and the character.

II. The soul needs food as really as the body.

III. The food of the soul is that which gives it spiritual life, develops character, satisfies its wants, strengthens its faculties.

IV. A new heart, given through faith, is the source of all good works.

V. The true bread is (1) from God, (2) life-giving, (3) for all the world, (4) satisfies the wants of the soul.

VI. This true bread (1) satisfies, (2) continues, (3) gives salvation, (4) brings eternal life here, (5) gives eternal life beyond the grave.

VII. The way to obtain this bread of life is by coming to Jesus, believing on Jesus, loving Jesus.

REVIEW EXERCISE.—(For the whole school in concert).—7. Where did the people next find Jesus? ANS. At Capernaum. 8. What instruction did he give them from the miracle they had seen? ANS. (Repeat v. 27) 9. Who is the bread of life? ANS. Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life. 10. How may we obtain the bread of life? ANS. By going to Jesus and believing on him. 11. What promises does he make to those who believe? ANS. "Him that cometh to me, I will in nowise cast out, but he shall have everlasting life."

SIR WILLIAM MCARTHUR, a prominent Wesleyan Methodist, and whose name is identified with many noble Christian works, and whose liberality is so widely known and felt, has made a proposal to the trustees of the Methodist College Belfast, to the effect that he will erect a hall or institute for the education of ministers' daughters, if a suitable site is allotted on the college grounds. The offer has been promptly accepted.