

Our Story.

BARBARA STREET.

A FAMILY STORY OF TO-DAY. BY THE AUTHOR OF "OUR NELL," "A SAILOR'S DAUGHTER," ETC.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TWO INTERVIEWS.

"AND you have known it, Georgina, all this time, and have treated me just the same?" So said Hester, with a wondering expression of face, as she knelt by her friend's side the following Sunday evening. Miss Denston was better than usual this evening, and was sitting in an easy-chair by the open window. Her worn face had a look of content at variance with its ordinary expression, her blue eyes looked unusually deep through tears. "My dear child, how should I treat you?" she said. "To be angry with you, were my nature capable of such injustice, were to hurt myself far more." "But did you feel no bitterness when you thought of the injury we had done you—all the suffering that has come to you through us?" "You have repaid me, dearest Hester, a hundred times." "Ah, how good you are!" Hester exclaimed, holding, with revivifying clasp, Miss Denston's nerveless hands, over which the blue veins crossed and recrossed, in her own young firm ones. "My poor father can do nothing now to make amends, and we are so poor and powerless." "You pay it back in richer kind, dear Hester. How often have we said that love is the best gift, the best possession this world can afford!" Hester was silent for a moment. "And my father—can you at all forgive him?" "Yes, Hester, I do not feel the resentment I did, now that he is no longer merely a name, but a suffering human being like myself. Besides, he has given me you." "You take a great weight from my heart," said Hester, with a sigh. The discovery that Miss Denston could be thus generous added to her sense of relief. "It is a strange life we are leading now," she continued, her old habit of confiding her experience here gaining upon her: "our father given back to us as if from the dead, and yet slipping fast away from us again! I do not realize it. It will always seem a dream." "And your sister Grace—is she as practical and full of importance as ever?" Hester flushed up. "Ah, Grace!" she exclaimed in a tone full of feeling: "she has been so good to me—so perfect. Oh, Georgie, I am ashamed to remember how I have talked about her to you! I have so misjudged her! These troubles have made me know her as I never did before. It was not she who kept me in ignorance, as I thought." Hester had never realized that Miss Denston's suggestions had, in old days, done half the mischief. But Miss Denston felt that her power in that direction was at an end, and that she must be on her guard lest she lose her power still further. She had come to be aware that Hester was no longer hers in the old sense. Within the last month or two, Hester had expanded into a woman under other influences than hers. The transition stage of an unavailing struggle to hold her back had passed, and she had accepted the inevitable, thankful to retain as much as she did, and gaining a new security founded on Hester's loyalty of nature. As to Hester's attitude towards her brother, she believed that to be a bud which would never ripen, wanting the quickening sun and shower; but she was still apprehensive on the score of Philip's too friendly manner. She answered— "I am truly glad," and stooped to kiss Hester's forehead. "You and she have never been altogether sympathetic before." Hester rejoined in her friend's sympathy, which was to her all that it seemed. Hester had not ceased to feed herself on illusions. "So long as you love me," continued Miss Denston, smiling, "I will not be jealous of any one so ever." At this moment an expression flitted over Hester's face, which might be called the shadow of a blush. The front-door opened and shut, and Philip was seen to cross the road to No. 47. Miss Denston looked after him, and said— "He has gone to have a chat with his friend, I suppose, but he will find him out." He has taken Kitty to church, I saw them start. Hester was silent for a time, then she ventured to say, "I suppose Mr. Denston was very surprised when he learned about us." "He must have been surprised, but I do not think the matter affected him very much. Philip's feelings are not acute, like mine; they are too much under the domination of reason. Principle guides him, I believe, but not affection." Miss Denston studied Hester's face, but did not see any sign of her being moved by this speech. Indeed, Hester was not at all moved. She knew that Miss Denston did not understand her brother, and she was occupied just then in picturing the scene in the parlour over the way, where Grace was experiencing a similar surprise to that which had awaited herself. But she was recalled to a vivid interest in the conversation by the tone Miss Denston now gave to it. "We have not had much talk together of late, my dear Hester; and yet I, as well as you, have been in much trouble, and sympathy is a healing balm when the heart is sore." "Have you been suffering more than usual?" "No, I have felt better—better than for a long time past. I think I shall venture to walk a little way to-morrow, if you will come across and give me your arm. I am very thankful for this alleviation of our present anxieties, for I must work harder now, in order that Philip may never be tempted to work as hard again. I am denying myself many of my little comforts, and shall now feel it necessary to take a larger share in the maintenance of our poor home. He has gone back to work again the last week, you know, and I fear it has tried him sadly." Hester had pressed her friend's hands firmly in her own, and looked up at her with speaking eyes, as Miss Denston expressed her new resolutions. But she looked down again at those last words to hide the too keen emotions which might betray themselves in her face. "Is not that against the doctor's orders?" she asked. "Why do you think so?" asked Miss Denston, sharply.

"I understand that Dr. Black had not given him permission," replied Hester, hesitatingly, still without lifting her eyes. "If so, I should have known of it," said Miss Denston, decidedly. "No; he must be careful, of course, in every possible way, but Mr. Burrows values him so highly that that will be quite possible." "Have you anything to depend upon besides his salary, Georgina?" Hester, unconscious now of herself, in her earnestness raised her face, which was very pale. "I have £20 a year, which was left me by an aunt," replied Miss Denston, with a melancholy smile. "I don't know whether you consider that something to depend upon." "Oh, if I could only do something to help," said Hester, signing deeply. "Georgina, I think I shall take a governess's situation, and give you my salary." "Dear child! but why do you talk so? I am in no want." "But you may be, and nothing I could do would come near what I want to do." Hester's mind was full of the sad knowledge that Philip's condition was a far more critical one than his sister imagined. "I want you, not what you can do," said Miss Denston, fondly, releasing one of her hands to stroke Hester's hair. "There is one great comfort," she said, by-and-by, "and that is that poor Philip has not the additional burden of a hopeless attachment on his mind. He gave me to understand only the other day that he had never loved. He will, I believe, never marry, nor desire to marry, even should he be in a position to do so. If he ever should, Hester, you would come to live with me, would you not? and we would struggle on together. You should teach and I would write, and we should be very happy, in spite of hard work, and deprivation, should we not?" Hester had blushed and paled, in spite of herself but she struggled to respond conformably to the expectations of her friend. That these expectations were inquisitorial she hardly recognized, but they were painful, and taxed her self-restraint. "I shall be always yours, to do with what you like," she said at last, after some further talk had transpired, the while looking into Miss Denston's eyes. She had a sense of solemn self-surrender, which was the result of a struggle prior to this crucial interview. She felt none of the old horror of bondage seizing her, because she had long since faced the situation, and resolved to submit herself to it with a voluntary choice of the duty, and not from a slavish cowardice. There is a service which is perfect freedom, a self-losing which is only the truest self-finding. Hester showed no longer weakness, but strength, in accepting thus the obligations she believed imposed on her by her own former weakness, by Miss Denston's necessity, and by her father's misconduct. Mr. Denston had not returned, but Hester felt a desire to be alone, and she took leave of her friend and went home. The dining-room door was closed; she passed it and went to her room. By-and-by Grace would come and tell her what had passed, but she awaited that with interest rather than excitement. Her interview with Miss Denston had left a feeling of satisfaction in her mind. She felt more composed than she had done for long. Things were now made clear and straight; her friend had taken a more generous part than she had dared to hope; relations of mutual confidence, with no under-current of suspicion or disaffection, had once more been established between them, and on safer grounds than of old—all these were matters of comfort. By-and-by she heard the front-door bang, and then, as she expected, Grace's light feet running up the stairs. But what was her amazement to see her sister rush into the room in a state of excessive pallor and agitation. She seemed about to throw herself on the bed when Hester, who was sitting where she was not necessarily seen by a person entering, addressed her. Grace started violently, and exclaimed, wildly— "Oh! Hester! I did not see you. I did not know there was any one here." "What is the matter, Grace?" asked Hester, who rose and caught her sister's arm, as she was on the point of rushing away again. "You startled me," said Grace, in a sharp unnatural voice. But as Hester continued to hold her, and look at her in surprise, Grace added, "Don't speak to me, Hester. Let me go—let me go at once!" A little while back it would never have occurred to Hester to withstand Grace in any way. But she was not now inclined to submit passively to her sister's will. She held her firmly. Grace at first stared at her with wild defiant eyes, like some wild creature caught in a net; and then, suddenly throwing her arms around Hester, began to sob and cry distractedly. It was long before Hester could get a word from her, and in the meantime we may seek, in the interview just passed, the explanation at present denied to Hester. To estimate aright the issues of that interview it is necessary to understand the state of mind which each of the persons concerned had brought to it. They were, indeed, like the flint and the steel, from which, if brought together, fire is sure to issue. Denston's mind was inflammable enough to need only a spark for combustion. He had had a week in which to work himself to fever-heat in anticipating their interview and revolving the possible meaning of it. He was weak in body, feverish from his just-resumed and undue exertions, and sleepless at night; and these things stole from his strength of mind. A hopeless depression had seized him, with a clinging murderous tenacity. The exertion he was resuming, while it was robbing him of his strength to face the fact, was also assuring him more loudly day by day that the doctor was right; and that if he kept to his post he would fall at it. Yet other alternative than to keep at his post there was none. His philosophy at this time failed him. His old pagan stoicism and his later more religious acquiescence in the Divine will, alike forsook him. In his present weakness of body, to struggle for his usual mastery over his spiritual motions, was an effort to which he could not attain, and he was beginning to lose his sense of the importance of doing so, and to sink into acquiescence in his own defect. Grace awaited his coming with feelings different from those of the former occasion. Then her anxiety had been all for Hester. Denston himself was nothing to her. He was barred from her by her own vague sense of repugnance, which prevented her sympathy from being drawn out towards him. But all this was now changed, for in Denston she now saw a man who had been injured by her own father, whose burdens belong in some measure to her own shoulders. Since that evening he had been much in her thoughts; she had dwelt with pain and pity on his situation; she had longed to be able to relieve it—had even felt bound to do some-

thing to relieve it, if that something could be found—had pondered and debated and perplexed herself to no purpose. And now her business was to let him know of this injury that had been done him by the man whose daughter she believed he loved, and that was a task calling for sympathy, and not the cold attitude of inspection which she had maintained before. He was a reserved man, that Grace knew, but she resolved he should not keep her at a distance by his reserve; he should be forced to admit her sympathy. When Denston understood what it was that Grace had to tell him, he sustained the first shock to that ill-founded composure of manner which he had brought to the interview. He had expected some further development of the subject of Hester; by no means had he expected to be assailed in so personal a quarter. Grace had been so engrossed in her mission, that she had not asked him to sit; and she stood near to him, looking at him with a world of feeling in her great dark eyes. Denston was a man proud enough to shrink from pity, under ordinary conditions, as intolerable; but the presence of any emotion towards himself in this girl, with whom his relations had hitherto been of the driest and coldest, in spite of himself, burst through the crust which had covered the hidden fire. His silence, his constraint, were incomprehensible to Grace, except as the result of a determined and ungenerous reserve, to conquer which, for Hester's sake, she felt a strong impulse rising. "Oh, Mr. Denston," she said, "if this is, as you say, no news to you, it is, of course, no surprise, no shock, and you are too magnanimous for it to make any difference in your feeling towards us. But with us it is different. It has come upon us with a great shock. My poor mother is still in ignorance, and I dare not tell her just now." "Why should you tell her," asked Denston, slowly lifting his eyes, but dropping them again immediately, "if it would trouble her?" "Can you not see? She would be shut out from a world of feeling she would wish to share. You are to her now an ordinary friend; she feels no different tie from that of an ordinary friendship." "What difference can this knowledge make? None at all." "Oh, indeed yes, Mr. Denston, if you were generous you would admit that our feelings towards you and your sister must be different from those towards any others whom we know. We would do anything, make any sacrifice, yes, any sacrifice in the world, if we could but make up to you in some degree for the past." Grace spoke with a religious earnestness which made Denston quiver from head to foot. He exerted himself to reply, knowing how extraordinary his silence must appear. "You are under no obligation—you are mistaken—and there is no sacrifice needed. Some sacrifices are impossible." He scarcely knew what he had said; words had come without his will. But they conveyed a sense of enlightenment to Grace concerning his manner and his meaning. He spoke of Hester. He meant he could not in honour ask for her love, nor that she should sacrifice herself to the uncertain future which was linked with him. But Hester loved him already! What to do at this moment when all was at the touch—encourage or discourage? "No, no," she said, "surely not. There are some sacrifices which seem so to onlookers, but where there is feeling—oh, Mr. Denston, you do not know how cruel it is for us to look on and see you suffering, and your sister." Denston made a gesture of deprecation. "Oh, yes," said Grace, in a tone full of the gentlest reproach, "your pride is hurt when I say that. I am hurting your pride to-night by all I say. And yet it is not right that it should be so. We want to do no more than obey—we are told to bear one another's burdens. Won't you accept even sympathy from us, who owe so much? It were indeed ungenerous, that." Grace ended in an accent of timid appeal. She had come nearer, and Denston, looking up suddenly, saw tears in her eyes. "I should not be content with that," he said, looking at her fixedly for the first time in the interview; "it would have to be all or nothing." Again he felt that these words were not what he intended to say. He listened to himself, as if it were another person speaking. He was shocked to hear them. He thought of rushing away at once—resolved to do so, yet did not move. The blood had flown into Grace's face, with the shock of this decisive revelation of his feelings. "Oh," she said, impulsively, "why not ask for more? I think you have a right." Denston could scarcely believe he had heard these words in reality. The situation grew more and more like a dream. Yet he could not have misunderstood her, nor she him. The thought of Hester never occurred to him, possessed, as he was, by passionate feeling that obscured judgment. "You say that? You mean that? Am I to ask for what I want, in spite of my poverty and misery? Impossible!" "Oh, I don't know what I have said," cried Grace, trembling. "I wish my mother knew. But oh, love is stronger than everything, isn't it? Nothing can withstand it." "It is impossible you can mean to give me hope. I am a coward to take advantage of it. But you have tempted me. I have nothing to offer you but hopelessness. I don't ask you to love me, but you have tempted me to say that I love you." Denston looked full into Grace's eyes, which gazed upon him in a stony way, as if fascinated. "Me!" she exclaimed, in an almost inaudible voice. Her brain was reeling. The idea that Denston loved her and not Hester slowly infused itself through her whole system like a horrible poison. Denston continued— "I have done wrong to speak to you like this. I don't know how I came to do it. I cannot ask you to love me. I cannot wish it. I will go at once." But again Denston did not move; it was hardly likely he should, as Grace stood there, motionless, holding him with those spell-bound eyes. She felt as if she should never speak. She had given him encouragement—how could she say that it was on Hester's behalf? That would be to betray Hester. He loved her—Grace! What a fact to be added to his pitiful fate was this—that he should love his enemy's daughter, and that she should repulse him! Her reason tried to save her from slipping into the snare which had been set about her feet by telling her that compliance without love would be worse than useless. But the impulses of the moment spoke more strongly; and overpowered reason. She said at last— "And if— You would be happy?" The gap in her words explained itself.

Denston made no reply except by look—a look more eloquent than any words—a look which Grace never forgot. "Oh!" cried Grace, "we are very unhappy! What am I to do!" It was a despairing cry, but there was no hardness in the tone of it, and an ear might have fancied there were tenderness. Denston did not actually move, but something in his air must have foreshadowed a movement towards her, for Grace suddenly shrank back, and gasped— "Don't touch me—not now—don't say any more now." He looked at her again—this time keenly, he started a moment, and then walked away deliberately, without a farewell of any kind, and let himself out of the house. (To be continued)

Sabbath School Work.

LESSON HELPS.

THIRD QUARTER.

JESUS INTERCEDING.

LESSON XII., September 10th, John xvii 1, 11-21; memorise verses 20-24.

GOLDEN TEXT—He ever liveth to make intercession for them.—Heb. vii. 25.

NOTE.—This lesson as selected by the International Committee, was so long (26 verses), that the leading publishing houses agreed on the above shorter selection. (See Les. 4.)

TIME.—Thursday evening, very late, April 6, A.D., 30, immediately following the last lesson.

PLACE.—An upper room in Jerusalem.

CIRCUMSTANCES.—The farewell discourse of Christ, ended with a remarkable prayer which may truly be called the Lord's prayer.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.—1. The hour is come: the hour of crucifixion, the central point of his redeeming work. Glorify thy son: manifest his glory by making his mission a success, by raising him from the dead, and placing him at thy right hand in heaven. Thy Son glorify thee, the atonement and redemption in Christ manifested God's love and wisdom which are his glory. 2. Eternal life, true spiritual life, begun here, but which endures forever. 3. This is life eternal, that they might know thee, by experience, by partaking of God's nature. 11. That they may be one: not uniformity but unity; not oneness of organization, but of life and love. The unity of a vine with one life, one root, but many branches. The unity of an army with many departments and regiments. Christians have the same spiritual life, the same leader, the same law, the same purpose, mutual love. 12. That the Scriptures might be fulfilled: Ps. xli. 9 (John xiii. 18). He did not fall because it was in the Scripture, but when he fell it was seen that he had voluntarily fulfilled the prediction. 14. They are not of the world: but are under a different Master, living a different life. 15. Not take them out of the world: because they were needed in it to do Christ's work, preach his truth, save the men he came to save. Keep them from the evil: i.e., from sin the greatest of evils. How? by the word of truth, by working for Christ, by the higher joys of goodness, by the discipline of life, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. 17. Sanctify: set apart for religious work, hence, to make holy.

SUBJECTS FOR SPECIAL REPORTS.—Characteristics of this prayer.—The glory of the Son.—Life eternal.—The unity of the Church.—Christians not of the world.—Kept from the evil.—Sanctified by the truth.

QUESTIONS.

INTRODUCTORY.—What is usually called the Lord's prayer? May this chapter be called also the Lord's prayer? Where was this prayer uttered? Under what circumstances? What are the characteristics of this prayer?

SUBJECT: WHAT JESUS MOST DESIRES FOR HIS PEOPLE.

I. THAT THEY MAY HAVE ETERNAL LIFE (vs. 1, 3).—In what form did Jesus pray? What hour had come? How was the Son to be glorified? What power had been given him? What is eternal life? What must we do to have eternal life?

How does glorifying the Son enable him to glorify the Father? Is the gift of eternal life limited to those whom God had given him? How is knowing God and Christ eternal life?

II. THAT THEY MAY BE ONE (vs. 11-21).—What is the unity Christ desires for his people? To what does he liken it? (See also v. 23.) What will be the effect of this unity? (v. 21.) Why? Is the Church gaining in unity?

III. THAT THEY MAY BE KEPT FROM THE EVIL (vs. 12-15).—How had the disciples been kept? Which one had been lost? Why? (v. 12, 1 John ii. 19.) Why would Christ have the disciples remain in the world? Does he want us to live in this busy and evil world? From what would he have us kept? How?

IV. THAT THEY MAY BE SANCTIFIED (vs. 16, 17, 19).—What is it to be sanctified? How may we be sanctified? How does the truth do this? What is the truth?

V. THAT THEY MAY FULFILL THEIR MISSION (v. 17).—For what had Jesus been sent into the world? In what respects are we sent like him into the world?

VI. THAT ALL CHRISTIANS MAY HAVE THE SAME BLESSINGS AS THE DISCIPLES (v. 20).—For whom did Jesus pray? What is one work he is ever doing for us? (Heb. vii. 25.)

VII. THAT THEY MAY PARTAKE OF HIS GLORY.—What was Jesus' glory? (v. 24.) What will be ours if we faithfully serve him? What blessings does this include?

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

I. Those things which Jesus prayed for in our behalf are the ones we should most earnestly seek.

II. We are Christ's representatives on earth, and should carry on his work in his way.

III. The true Christian's place is in the world, but kept from its evil.

IV. Being sanctified by the truth, we should study much the Word by which we are sanctified.

V. We should in every true way seek to realize Christ's prayer for the unity of all Christians.

VI. Those who work with Christ, suffer with him, and are sanctified with him, will also partake of his ineffable glory.

REVIEW EXERCISE. (For the whole school in concert.)—12. For what seven most important things did Christ pray for his people? ANSWERS (Repeat the headings of this lesson.)—Peloidet.