

Our Story.

THE HOUSEHOLD OF McNEIL.

BY AMELIA E. BARR, Author of "Jan Velder's Wife," "The Daughter of Five," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

He would not see Maxwell. He said boldly that "it was not his interest to find his wife." In spite of the general sympathy for his loss and suffering, Colin had an unquenchable fire of hatred and suspicion in his heart against him. No one in Rome would listen to the faintest whisper, not even the police, but Colin was not influenced by this blindness of public judgment. He made every arrangement for the continuance of the search that love and hatred could devise.

CHAPTER XIII.—MAXWELL MARRIES AGAIN.

They to the verge have followed what they love, And on the insuperable threshold stand. Why perplex the soul with visions of a morrow, When to-day its counsels and its cares has brought?

After Helen's death Colin had found a small comfort in visiting her grave every day, and leaving there a sprig of box or a cluster of rowan berries, or even a trailing spray of some of the pale cold flowers of the sea. However simple the offering, it was a token of his remembrance. Those who have made such offerings will understand. The Lord did not speak of these visits, but he was aware of them, and when Colin went to Rome he frequently carried the token in his place. And as the mystery that surrounds posthumous humanity is so great, surely it is the part of love to live with regard to the dead as if they were observant of our memory of them.

One afternoon, about two weeks after Colin had left him, the Laird went to the kirk yard on this errand. He had been singularly miserable and restless all day; perhaps he hoped in this solitary communion to find comfort. But if comfort come not from within, nature is usually hostile to grief; and this afternoon the solemn mountains, the misty moorlands, the melancholy waves, had no token of hope in them. In the mournful light which brooded above the fallen sun, his tall, massive figure, standing solitary on the cliff, was the very image of desolation. There was a "cry" in the sea also that the cry in his heart answered. He knew that there was trouble in the air.

Fortunately Dr. Brodick was sitting with him when the news of Grizelda's death came. He took it with a terrible calmness. His face seemed to turn to granite. He was angry at the tears in Brodick's eyes.

"I will have no tears," he cried; "this is no time for them. I will have revenge!" The terrible vacillation of his suspicions would give him no rest. At one moment he was certain his child had been murdered. Again, he was certain she was alive, and calling to him for help. He thought of lonely convents, of the horrors of insane asylums and forgotten prison rooms, and felt as if impossibilities would be easy for her relief.

But, oh! how quickly love is made to feel the limitations of its physical conditions. "Go to Rome!" said Brodick, pitifully; "man, what will you do in Rome? Get yourself into trouble like-wise. Colin will have left ere you get there. No one but priests and Papists and slinging men and women to ask a question of. And they won't understand you, nor you them. Think of this, McNeil: if Grizelda is above the ground, she has wit enough and strength enough to find her way back, either to her home or to her husband. If it is still to her husband, what is there for you to do or to say? If she comes to you, then the way for interference will be made plain."

"She has money, thank God! When I saw her last I gave her money—two thousand pounds. Money can work wonders." "If she happened to have it with her. But money in a desk or drawer, I am feared there will be little help in that."

And McNeil spoke not. He was thinking of—he was really seeing—a slip of paper in the secret drawer of his own desk. It represented thousands of pounds, and it was doing no more good than it was blank. But at this hour the thought angered him. "The poor! What in his great sorrow were they to him? Could they give him help, or bring him word of his child? No. The trouble in his own house was sufficient for him to bear."

"My two dear girls," he cried out, "both taken from me in three months! Oh, Brodick, it is more than any mortal can bear."

have lost three children in three days. There is one father, Alexander Muir, who lost his whole household in a week—wife and five bairns. He is handling his nets again. The others are about their daily work. The Lord gave, and the Lord took away.

"Don't finish, Brodick! When God gives a blessing, is it godlike to be taking it back again? If I was to take back the land I gave to the village, what would you be saying of me?" "You cannot foresee the future, Laird; God can. Man whiles turns gifts into losses, and blessings into curses. The gift may be best for us this year on earth; next year it may be better for us to have it in heaven. Shall not the Judge of the whole earth do right?"

But McNeil was not to be reasoned with. He agreed indeed to wait for Colin's return, but the weeks intervening were weeks of great anxiety. As they passed one by one, and no word came from Grizelda, Brodick was certain of her death. If alive, she would have contrived to send her father word. If a ransom had been asked she would have appealed to him. And whenever this conclusion was reached, the men looked at each other with a dreadful intelligence, "if Grizelda was dead Maxwell had compassed her death."

Colin did not return until March was nearly over. But fortunately for McNeil he had been compelled ere that time to resume work on the hotel. The men at their dismissal in the fever time had been told to be ready on the first of March, and McNeil found them waiting his orders. It was a relief to his perpetual thoughts of wrong and plans of vengeance. For such corroding sorrow, work is the oldest evangel preached.

Carrying care for others he forgot himself. His wearied body compelled him to sleep, and sleep insensibly brought him something like patience. "He gives His beloved in their sleep," gives them consolation by angelic influences and hopeful dreams, sends some messenger to put right what they have put wrong; to influence the hearts of those who have them in their power in any way. He reproves their enemies. He strengthens their friends. He gives them in their sleep the blessing they need; for, perhaps, when we are waking we hinder the gift by the fearful complaining influences we call round us.

And McNeil, though chafing at Colin's failure, was compelled, at least for a while, to defer his own efforts. The detectives and other parties employed must have a reasonable time given them for investigation, as the future efforts of Grizelda's friends must depend upon what they accomplished or failed to accomplish.

For some weeks their reports were hopeful. "They were finding new clues, they were on the line of success; they had seen some one who had seen Grizelda in some distant village." Thus beguiled, McNeil and Colin saw the summer slip away. The hotel had been opened in June, and realized even more than the Laird's hopes. Never had there been such prosperity in Edderloch. The fishermen had a market at their hands. Their toil was well repaid. Their wives made knitted goods and sold them; their children were gullies to the gentlemen on the hills, or maids to the ladies in the hotel. Ready money was plentiful with those who had thought a shilling a large sum; and contentment and an air of happy employment was on every face.

The Laird felt his own anxious, fearful griefs all the more bitterly. This was the very state of things he had dreamed about and planned and worked for; and though it had come he was not able to enjoy the fruition of his hopes. His private griefs were in every success a dark and drifting shadow. But, when the hotel closed for the summer he was determined to go himself to Rome. Then even Dr. Brodick thought it would be best to sanction this personal gratification. The journey might divert his mind into new channels, and end a suspense which had lost all elements of hope, and become worse than the certainty of death. But the journey was as fruitless of comfort as Colin's worst fears. They found Grizelda's disappearance nearly forgotten. Half-a-dozen later tragedies had pushed it outside the sympathies and memories of men. Besides, sympathy is for the living; forgetfulness for the dead. Whatever interest there was in an affair, that was nearly a year old, went naturally to Lord Maxwell.

"Such a polite, generous, handsome young lord! And how he had suffered!" He had been carried to the seaside for the summer, and had just returned to Rome. A few people had seen him, "so white, so weak, so broken-down with suffering! And as for the lady, was she not very peculiar? Mrs. Pelham had a maid who had served Lady Maxwell for a month, and she was sure Lady Maxwell hated her husband." The next suggestion followed easily—"perhaps, indeed, she had another lover!" This suspicion was natural and not unreasonable to the Italian mind. It seemed the most likely solution of the mystery. "The pretended robber was a lover; she had been willingly abducted, and, if found, would probably refuse to return."

This view of the case was finally taken by the police. If there had been a robbery, it was impossible for the robbers to have escaped their extraordinary vigilance. If there had been a robbery it was for the jewels; and these

had never been offered for sale. Jewellers in all the great European cities had been advised of their loss, the setting described, and the size and colour of the stones.

"The lady had her jewels yet, there was no doubt. She was in hiding somewhere with her lover." And then Maxwell admitted with affected reluctance that he had been jealous of her frequent absences from her home. He said "he had followed her to a certain church, and to the studio of Signor Donata."

Italian husbands and wives shook their heads at these admissions. "To look at an altar picture! To take lessons from an aged painter! Was it conceivable that the wife of an English noble, a young and pretty woman, could have only such motives for conduct so unusual?"

All these suspicions came bluntly enough from the emissaries employed by Colin. They saw their occupation was at an end. They felt a kind of anger at the lady who had not answered their trifling efforts. To save their own reputation at the cost of hers was a satisfaction. The McNeil heard them with doubt and anger. He was resolved to see Maxwell, and he called upon him without warning or ceremony.

But Maxwell had heard of his presence in Rome. He was prepared for the visit. He met his father-in-law with a burst of tears and a clever imitation of extreme physical weakness and suffering. He deplored, he protested, he was on the point of fainting twice, he acknowledged that "he had sometimes pained Grizelda," and entreated Grizelda's father "to forgive him for her."

He did not convince McNeil, but he disarmed him for the time, and even compelled at parting a kind of conventional courtesy. And thus from the injured father there was unwittingly forced the only thing necessary for Maxwell's triumphant social acquittal. He could now talk of McNeil's kind visit to him, of McNeil's sympathy for his sufferings. He could sigh, and intimate so much by his sighs and by his very silences, that every one was sure that he had been a grievously wronged husband, and that Grizelda's father knew it.

But never for one moment did so shameful a suspicion find a home in the Laird's heart. And Colin did not resent it with more impetuous anger than did Dr. Brodick. Willful and selfish Grizelda might have been; but wicked and unwomanly—never! Not one of the three men would tolerate the thought.

"A year of change, and five years of rest to follow—the old proverb found in McNeil Castle a kind of verification. As time went on Grizelda's name was less and less spoken. But none that had loved forgot her. There were still days in which her father could not put down the conviction that she was alive, and that he should not die until he had seen her face again. For the soul believes as the body breathes. It has no need to discuss its faith or to examine its proofs. It has the evidence of things not seen.

He and Colin lived a very calm and methodical life. The success of the hotel had, as foreseen, necessitated more building. A pretty town was growing around it. The ancient fishing village was all astir with the changes constantly going on. The sheep farms were enlarged, the game strictly preserved, the two men were growing rich in money, and still richer in houses and lands.

In the spring there were always alterations and additions to make, planting to do, fishing boats and nets to look over, the hotel to put in order, etc. In summer and autumn the old silence of the hills and moors was broken by troops of visitors, by wandering artists, by sportsmen, by pilgrims of all kinds. In winter the Laird and Colin went to Edinburgh, and enjoyed a mild kind of social dissipation among their friends and relatives, and in pursuit of their particular hobbies.

(To be continued.)

Sabbath School Work.

LESSON HELPS.

LESSON IV. July 28, 1889.

ISRAEL. ASKING FOR A KING.

1 Sam. viii. 1-20.

COMMIT VERSES 4-7.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us.—1 Sam. viii. 19.

CENTRAL TRUTH.

We should seek to know God's will, rather than insist on our own.

DAILY READINGS.

M. 1 Sam. viii. 1-22.

Tu. Deut. xvii. 14-20.

W. 1 Kings xii. 1-15.

Th. Acts xviii. 16-33.

F. Ps. cvii. 1-15.

Sa. Ps. cxviii. 1-16.

Su. Matt. xxiii. 29-39.

TIME.—9 C. 1075-6, about 20 years after the last lesson. (Others make the date B.C. 1095.)

PLACE.—Rimah, the home of Samuel, four miles north-west of Jerusalem.

SAMUEL, now about 70 years old. For 40 years he had been prophet of Israel, and for 20 years Judge.

INTERVENING HISTORY.—A season of peace and prosperity followed the vic-

tory of our last lesson. Samuel had grown old, and made his sons Judges in Beersheba, 45 or 50 miles to the south-west.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.—4. The elders of Israel: the heads of families and leading persons, forming a kind of legislature. 5. Sons walk not in thy ways: they took bribes and perverted justice (v. 3). The things displeased Samuel: it was not wrong to have a king (Deut. xvii. 14, 20), but the request was a slur upon his administration, a rejection of God, a refusal to be as noble and holy a nation as God would have them to be. Why did they desire a king? (1) To be like other nations. (2) To have a visible leader for war (v. 2). (3) To give unity to the nation. (4) Samuel would not long be able to rule them, and his sons were not fit for the place. 7. They have not rejected me, chiefly, but they have rejected thee, in rejecting Samuel. How? (1) They did not ask what was best, but were determined to have their own way. (2) They were unwilling to be such a nation as God thought best. (3) They wanted success without obedience, and hoped they could have it by a king. (4) They distrusted God as their invisible leader. (5) Their motive was bad.—to be like other nations. 9. Hearken unto their voice grant their request: For so sinful a people a king was the best, as a punishment for their not being more worthy. 11. This will be the manner of the king: (1) He would bring in luxury at the people's expense. (2) He would limit their freedom. (3) He would impose high taxes and drain the wealth of the people.

SUBJECTS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND SPECIAL REPORTS.—Samuel.—Samuel's sons.—Why the Israelites desired a king.—Was it best for them to have a king.—Why Samuel was displeased.—How their request was a rejection of God.—Why God answered their prayer.—The manner of the king.—How men now reject God.

QUESTIONS. REVIEW.—In our last lesson what great meeting was held? What sermon was preached? What victory was gained, and how?

INTRODUCTION.—How many years between our last lesson and this? Who was judge at this time? Where did he live? What was the condition of the country? (1 Sam. vii. 13, 14)

SUBJECT: REJECTING OUR SAVIOUR AND GOD.

I. WHY THE ISRAELITES REJECTED GOD (vs. 4, 5, 20).—Who came to Samuel with a message? Who were the elders? Where did they find Samuel? What was their request? What circumstances probably led them to ask for a king at this time? (xi. 1-3; xi. 12.) What was the first reason given? How old was Samuel? What was the second reason? How did Samuel's sons behave? (v. 3.) How did it come that Samuel had such bad sons? What does Paul say of the love of money? (1 Tim. vi. 10) What is a bribe? What sins arise from covetousness? What was the third reason for asking a king? What was the fourth reason?

II. HOW THEY REJECTED GOD (vs. 6-9). How did the request of the elders affect Samuel? Why was he displeased? What had he done for the people? (xii. 15, 23) Were they ungrateful? What did Samuel do in this trial? What does his example teach us? (James v. 13) What answer did he receive from God? How was the course of the Israelites a rejection of God? Was it wrong to have a king? (Deut. xvii. 14) Who had been the king of Israel hitherto? (xii. 12) What had he done for them? (xii. 8-15) Had he ever failed them when they had been obedient and loyal? How was the request of the people a distrust of God?

Who is our rightful king? What is it for us to reject him? In what ways is it done? What has he done for us?

III. THE EFFECTS OF REJECTING GOD (vs. 10-19).—What further warning did Samuel give the people? What would be the manner of the king? How would he bring in luxury and tend to war? How would he restrict their liberty? How would he impose high taxes? Give an example only a century later. (1 Kings x. 16-29; xii. 1-14.) Why did God answer such a prayer? Would it have been better if they had been good enough to have their prayer denied? (Ps. cvi. 15.) Is it wise for us always to pray, Thy will be done? What evils now come to those who reject God?

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS. I. The best of men sometimes have bad children. II. We often earnestly desire things not best for us to have. III. There may be sin and folly as well as danger in the desire to be like other people. IV. Be very careful of the feelings of the old. V. We reject God when we refuse to obey him, when we insist on our will contrary to God's; when we neglect his Word, and reject his ministers, and do not live on Jesus. VI. God sometimes yields to our requests, because we are not worthy of the best things he has planned for us.—Peloubet.

It is better to have thorns in the flesh with grace to endure them, than to have no thorns and no grace.—Evangelical Messenger.

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