



"Tis sweet to hear the watch-dog's honest bark
Bay deep-mouthed welcome as we draw near home;
'Tis sweet to know there is an eye will mark
Our coming, and look brighter when we come.

—Byron.

A FAIR BARBARIAN.

BY FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT.

CHAPTER VI.

Accidental.

When dinner was over, Lady Theobald rose, and proceeded to the drawing-room, Lucia following in her wake. From her very babyhood Lucia had disliked the drawing-room, which was an imposing apartment of great length and height, containing much massive furniture, upholstered in faded blue satin. All the girl's evenings, since her fifth year, had been spent sitting opposite her grandmother, in one of the straightest of the blue chairs: all the most scathing reproaches she had received had been administered to her at such times. She had a secret theory, indeed, that all unpleasant things occurred in the drawing-room after dinner.

Just as they had seated themselves, and Lady Theobald was on the point of drawing toward her the little basket containing the gray woollen mittens she made a duty of employing herself by knitting each evening, Dobson, the coachman, in his character of footman, threw open the door, and announced a visitor.

"Capt. Barold."

Lady Theobald dropped her gray mittens, the steel needles falling upon the table with a clink. She rose to her feet at once, and met half-way the young man who had entered.

"My dear Francis," she remarked, "I am exceedingly glad to see you at last," with a slight emphasis upon the "at last."

"Tha-anks," said Capt. Barold, rather languidly. "You're very good, I'm sure."

Then he glanced at Lucia, and Lady Theobald addressed her:—

"Lucia," she said, "this is Francis Barold, who is your cousin."

Capt. Barold shook hands feebly. "I have been trying to find out whether it is third or fourth," he said. "It is third," said my lady.

Lucia had never seen her display such cordiality to anybody. But Capt. Francis Barold did not seem much impressed by it. It struck Lucia that he would not be likely to be impressed by anything. He seated himself near her grandmother's chair, and proceeded to explain his presence on the spot, without exhibiting much interest even in his own relation of facts.

"I promised the Rathbuns that I would spend a week at their place; and Slowbridge was on the way, so it occurred to me I would drop off in passing. The Rathbuns' place, Broadoaks, is about ten miles farther on; not far, you see."

"Then," said Lady Theobald, "I am to understand that your visit is accidental."

Capt. Barold was not embarrassed. He did not attempt to avoid her ladyship's rather searching eye, as he made his cool reply.

"Well, yes," he said. "I beg pardon, but it is accidental, rather."

Lucia gave him a pretty, frightened look, as if she felt that, after such an audacious confession, something very serious must happen; but nothing serious happened at all. Singularly enough, it was Lady Theobald herself who looked ill at ease, and as though she had not been prepared for such a contingency.

During the whole of the evening, in fact, it was always Lady Theobald who was placed at a disadvantage, Lucia discovered. She could hardly realize the fact at first; but before an hour had passed its truth was forced upon her.

Capt. Barold was a very striking-looking man, upon the whole. He was large, gracefully built, and fair; his eyes were gray, and noticeable for the coldness of their expression, his features regular and aquiline, his movements leisurely.

As he conversed with her grandmother, Lucia wondered at him privately. It seemed to her innocent mind that he had been everywhere, and seen everything and everybody, without caring for or enjoying his privileges. The truth was, that he had seen and experienced a great deal too much. As an only child, the heir to a large property, and heir prospective to one of the oldest titles in the country, he had exhausted life early. He saw in Lady Theobald, not the imposing head and social front of Slowbridge social life, the power who rewarded with approval and punished with a frown, but a tiresome, pretentious old woman, whom his mother had asked him, for some feminine reason, to visit.

"She feels she has a claim upon us, Francis," she had said appealingly.

"Well," he had remarked, "that is rather deuced cool, isn't it? We have people enough on our hands without cultivating Slowbridge, you know."

His mother sighed faintly.

"It is true we have a great many people to consider; but I wish you would do it, my dear."

She did not say anything at all about Lucia: above all, she did not mention that a year ago she herself had spent two or three days at Slowbridge, and had been charmed beyond measure by the girl's innocent freshness, and that she had said, rather absently, to Lady Theobald,—

"What a charming wife Lucia would make for a man to whom gentleness and a yielding disposition were necessary! We do not find such girls in society nowadays, my dear Lady Theobald. It is very difficult of late years to find a girl who is not spoiled of as 'fast,' and who is not disposed to take the reins in her own hands. Our young men are flattered and courted until they become a little dictatorial, and our girls are spoiled at home. And the result is a great deal of domestic unhappiness afterward—and even a great deal of scandal, which is dreadful to contemplate. I cannot help feeling the greatest anxiety in secret concerning Francis. Young men so seldom consider these matters until it is too late."

"Girls are not trained as they were in my young days, or even in yours," said Lady Theobald. "They are allowed too much liberty. Lucia has been brought up immediately under my own eye."

"I feel that it is fortunate," remarked Mrs. Barold, quite incidentally, "that Francis need not make a point of money."

For a few moments Lady Theobald did not respond; but afterwards, in the course of the conversation which followed, she made an observation which was, of course, purely incidental. "If Lucia makes a marriage which

pleases her great-uncle, old Mr. Dugald Binnie, of Glasgow, she will be a fortunate girl. He has intimated, in his eccentric fashion, that his immense fortune will either be hers or will be spent in building charitable asylums of various kinds. He is a remarkable and singular man."

When Capt. Barold had entered his distinguished relative's drawing-room, he had not regarded his third cousin with a very great deal of interest. He had seen too many beauties in his thirty years to be greatly moved by the sight of one; and here was only a girl who had soft eyes, and looked young for her age, and who wore an ugly muslin gown, that most girls could not have carried off at all.

"You have spent the greater part of your life in Slowbridge?" he condescended to say in the course of the evening.

"I have lived here always," Lucia answered. "I have never been away more than a week at a time."

"Ah?" interrogatively. "I hope you have not found it dull."

"No," smiling a little. "Not very. You see, I have known nothing gayer."

"There is society enough of a harmless kind here," spoke up Lady Theobald virtuously. "I do not approve of a round of gayeties for young people; it unfits them for the duties of life."

But Capt. Barold was not as favorably impressed by these remarks as might have been anticipated.

"What an old fool she is!" was his polite inward comment. And he resolved at once to make his visit as brief as possible, and not to be induced to run down again during his stay at Broadoaks. He did not even take the trouble to appear to enjoy his evening.

From his earliest infancy, he had always found it easier to please himself than to please other people. In fact, the world had devoted itself to endeavoring to please him, and win his toleration, we may say, instead of admiration, since it could not hope for the latter. At home he had been adored rapturously by a large circle of affectionate male and female relatives; at school his tutors had been singularly indulgent of his faults and admiring of his talents, even among his fellow-pupils he had been a sort of autocrat. Why not, indeed, with such birthrights and such prospects? When he had entered society, he had met with even more amiable treatment from affectionate mothers, from innocent daughters, from cordial paternal parents, who voted him an exceedingly fine fellow. Why should he bore himself by taking the trouble to seem pleased by a stupid evening with an old grenadier in petticoats and a badly-dressed country girl?

Lucia was very glad when, in answer to a timidly appealing glance, Lady Theobald said,—

"It is half-past ten. You may wish us good-night, Lucia."

Lucia obeyed, as if she had been half-past ten herself, instead of nearly twenty; and Barold was not long in following her example.

Dobson led him to a stately chamber at the top of the staircase, and left him there. The captain chose the largest and most luxurious chair, sat down in it, and lighted a cigar at his leisure.

"Confoundedly stupid hole!" he said with a refined vigor one would scarcely have expected from an individual of his birth and breeding. "I shall leave tomorrow, of course. What was my mother thinking of? Stupid business from first to last."

CHAPTER VII.

"I should like to see more of Slowbridge."

When he announced at breakfast his intention of taking his departure on the midday train, Lucia wondered again what would happen; and again, to her relief, Lady Theobald was astonishingly lenient.

"As your friends expect you, of course we cannot overrule them," she said. "We will, however, hope to see something of you during your stay at Broadoaks. It will be very easy for you to run down and give us a few hours now and then."

"Tha-anks," said Capt. Barold.

He was decently civil, if not enthusiastic, during the few remaining hours of his stay. He stammered through the grounds with Lucia, who took charge of him in obedience to her grandmother's wish. He did not find her particularly troublesome when she was away from her ladyship's side. When she came out to him in her simple cotton gown and straw hat, it occurred to him that she was much prettier than he had thought her at first. For economical reasons she had made the little morning-dress herself, without the slightest regard for the designs of Miss Chickie; and as it was not trimmed at all, and had only a black-velvet ribbon at the waist, there was nothing to place her charming figure at a disadvantage. It could not be said that her shyness and simplicity delighted Capt. Barold, but, at least, they did not displease him; and this was really as much as could be expected.

"She does not expect a fellow to exert himself, at all events," was his inward comment; and he did not exert himself.

But, on the point of taking his departure, he went so far as to make a very gracious remark to her.

"I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing you in London for a season, before very long," he said: "my mother will have great pleasure in taking charge of you, if Lady Theobald cannot be induced to leave Slowbridge."

"Lucia never goes from home alone," said Lady Theobald; "but I should certainly be obliged to call upon your mother for her good offices, in the case of our spending a season in London. I am too old a woman to alter my mode of life altogether."

In obedience to her ladyship's orders, the venerable landau was brought to the door; and the two ladies drove to the station with him.

It was during this drive that a very curious incident occurred,—an incident to which, perhaps, this story owes its existence, since, if it had not taken place, there might, very possibly, have been no events of a stirring nature to chronicle. Just as Dobson drove rather slowly up the part of High Street distinguished by the presence of Miss Belinda Bassett's house, Capt. Barold suddenly appeared to be attracted by some figure he discovered in the garden appertaining to that modest structure.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, in an undertone, "there is Miss Octavia."

For the moment he was almost roused to a display of interest. A faint smile lighted his face, and his cold, handsome eyes slightly brightened.

Lady Theobald sat bolt upright.

"That is Miss Bassett's niece, from America," she said. "Do I understand you know her?"

(To be continued.)