

Choice Literature.

CAROLA.

BY HESBA STRETTON.

CHAPTER VII.—SEP. RATED.

There was no longer any question about the money with Matthias. Carola was already a Christian, and nothing he could do could save her from her doom. He told her the next day, without remonstrance or reproach, that she might go to the Rector of St. Chad's and tell him he would allow her £45 a year till she was twenty-one, and then the money which stood in his name in the Consols should be transferred to her. Before the next Sabbath came Carola was gone, and he was alone.

Carola's new life was exactly the reverse of the old. At a boarding-school in the out-skirts of a small country town, among girls who were the daughters of tradesmen and of small farmers, all the circumstances of daily life were utterly different. A fine network of rules and customs such as she had never dreamed of encompassed her. The Rector of St. Chad's, who had sent her there, had deemed it best not to say much of her former position, and had warned her not to talk of it herself. The school was well chosen; a good, homely place, where a plain and solid education was given, with no ludicrous attempts at gentility. Carola was not to waste time in acquiring a smattering of any accomplishment; but her voice was to be trained for singing, and she sang well.

She had never seen the interior of a church in London, and when she entered the long aisle of the parish church, with its arched roof resting upon polished columns, and saw the tinted light shining through the painted windows, and heard the deep and solemn tone of the organ, her heart beat fast with delight.

"Why is it so beautiful?" she asked; "is it because they love Him so? That makes me very glad."

But it was the same when she saw a little chapel standing alone amid the fields. It was not so grand and beautiful a place as the church, but if they who built it built it for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, that too made her happy, and it was a pleasant place to enter.

By-and-by she began to understand many things about the life of Christ that she could not have learned for herself, and she could place the incidents of that life into more harmonious order; but there remained a freshness and power in it which those around her, too long accustomed to read it with wandering minds, did not share with her. Shades of doctrine, which her teachers saw only too keenly, were altogether imperceptible to her. She wished to obey the precepts of Christianity with a literalness and simplicity which perplexed and embarrassed them; and there was a strange directness and fervour about her love to Christ, which set her, as it seemed, almost at variance with those about her.

It is true that something of this freshness and vigour of feeling wore away as years passed by, and the story of Christ's life grew more familiar to her. But still she had made the discovery of Him for herself; and there was too deep a fund of joyousness in that discovery to allow her to fall into the listlessness of so many Christians. The sun had so shone in upon her darkness that she could never love darkness rather than light.

As time went on, Carola scarcely cast a glance backward. She was of a nature that lived intently in the present, and this was so full of new interests and occupations that she seemed to have no time to recall the past. Moreover, there was nothing to link her with it. Matthias reckoned her as dead to him, and held no communication with her. He punctually paid the interest of her money to the Rector of St. Chad's, exacting a receipt from the ladies who kept the school where Carola was; for he had no faith in a Christian, and especially in a Christian clergyman. But no message from him reached the girl; and though now and then, as she read in the Testament how the Jews denied their Lord, and persecuted Him, and at last crucified Him, a sad memory of Matthias, who would have done the same, crossed her mind, she willingly banished it, lest any feeling of personal hatred should mingle with her indignant sorrow at their crimes.

As for Matthias, his heart seemed to be dead within him; though he still sat at his cobler's stall, and many a tattered Christian child went away shod from his shop-door, with no more money dropped into his till. It was almost mechanically that he continued to do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with his God; there was no more a happy consciousness in him that he was doing so. Day after day he saw the never-ending flood of wretchedness and crime from which he had done his best to save Carola, as though he had stood upon the brink of a darksome pit, and knew that she was lost there though out of sight. Her garret was empty, for he would never let it to a stranger; and the Christian woman whom he was compelled to have to wait on him on the Sabbath, kept it clean and habitable, but he could not bring his mind to enter it. Sometimes during the long and dreary Sabbath hours he fancied he could hear the old grandmother and Carola talking overhead. But it was only a dream; and when he roused himself how silent and empty was all his life!

A stealthy feeling of triumph moved his cold heart when he heard of the death of the Rector who had stolen Carola away from him. Not that he expected to find her again; he did not even hope for it. She had become a Christian in spite of his precautions, and was lost to him. But his foe was dead, and could exact over him no longer. When Carola was twenty-one, he transferred the money in the Consols to her name, and felt as if the last interest that tied him to earth was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.—A VILLAGE SCHOOLMISTRESS.

A few days after old Matthias Levi had transferred her little fortune to Carola, she entered upon a new life. The post-of-village schoolmistress was offered to her through her

governesses, and she accepted it gladly. It was a small endowed school, founded by a certain Lady Hazelmount more than a hundred years ago, with a salary of £50 a year and a cottage and garden attached to the school house rent free. The Rector of St. Chad's, had, before his death, recommended her to the office when it should next be vacant, and the vacancy occurred just as Carola was twenty-one.

She awoke with the earliest gleam of dawn on the morning after the long journey that had carried her down to Hazelmount. There was at first no sound to be heard save the rustling of ivy-leaves round her open window, a sound more soothing than is dead silence; and she might have fallen asleep again but for the sudden crowing of a cock, which seemed to awaken a hundred chirping little birds under the eaves of the thatched roof. Very soft and sleepy the twittering was at first, but as the light grew stronger, all the many cries and notes of country life resounded through her quiet chamber, and Carola made haste to dress herself, and see what her new home was like.

A short flight of stairs led her down into a large, old-fashioned kitchen, with a low ceiling crossed by massive oak beams. A broad, deep window of lattice-panes stretched across the one side of the kitchen, and on the window-sill stood a blue jug, filled with tall white lilies, which just caught the first rays of the rising sun. The quarried floor was of dark red, and the oak chairs and table, and the long dresser near the window, were almost black with age. An eight-day clock, a hundred years old, was ticking softly in a corner. The tender sunlight was flickering here and there through the quivering ivy leaves, and filling the pleasant room with a cool and subtle cheerfulness. Carola looked round with a smile of utter contentment. She had never seen a place like this before; never before had she felt as if she had a home. She breathed a sigh of satisfaction, though the tears started to her eyes. "Jesus Christ and His mother could have lived here," she said to herself.

The thought made it seem a holy place, without taking away from its homeliness. Yes, Mary might have sat there, in the tall old arm-chair in the chimney-corner; and the Lord, weary and wayworn as He often was, could have rested on the oaken settee, with its high back, which screened the chimney-corner from the door. Oh! if she could but have ministered to Him as the women did! If she could but have washed His feet, and wiped them with her hair, and kissed them with many kisses! Or if He would have asked her, as He asked the woman of Samaria, to bring Him water to drink! She had never seen a place before where she could fancy Him living at home, as He might have done here, in this spotlessly clean and solemn, yet cheerful room. The thought of it made her wondrously happy, as she crossed the quarried floor with quiet steps, and threw open the lattice-casement.

"How lovely it is!" she breathed, half aloud.

The cottage stood on the slope of a hill, and as far as her eager eyes could reach there stretched a vast plain of meadows and cornfields, losing themselves in a hazy distance, yet with faint forms lying across the dim horizon, which might be either low soft clouds or far-off mountains. Near at hand the hedge-rows were full of fine oak and elm trees, still in full leaf, but with shining gossamer webs woven round them. The sun was touching all the landscape with its earliest and tenderest rays; and low-lying beds of mist, brooding over the hollows, gleamed like pools of silver in the light. A narrow lane ran past her cottage, and on the other side of it was a cornfield, with the corn gathered into brown shocks, which cast long shadows across the yellow ground; whilst the restless leaves of a row of aspen trees glistened and danced in the morning breeze. As she leaned through the window, scarcely breathing for very gladness, a lark began to sing so suddenly as almost to startle her with the flutter of sweet song that fell upon her ear. Carola listened as if she had never heard a bird sing before.

"Yes, certainly He might have lived here," she thought, "and yonder is the cornfield where He walked with His disciples on the Sabbath day. And it is my own house," she added, as she turned away from the open window.

Home was a thought entirely new to her. She had been happy at school, working hard to gain the knowledge she longed for; but it had been too full of little rules and regulations to possess the freedom of a home, and Carola had always loved freedom. It was very pleasant to her, lonely as she was, to set about her morning's work, kindling the fire, and hanging the kettle on to the chain and hook which fell from the chimney. The housewife's instinct stirred pleasantly within her. She had never tasted a meal so delicious as the breakfast she ate with her door open, and the little birds hopping fearlessly on to her door-sill to pick up the crumbs she scattered for them. How good it was to have a home, especially such a home as the Lord Himself might have lived in.

Her work as schoolmistress was not to begin till the harvest was over, but Carola found plenty to do, and the day passed quickly by. The corn field before her house was a busy place, and now and then she paused to watch the wagons coming and going, and the band of harvest-men lading them. Hilt little knots of women and children loitered round the gate and under the hedges. Towards evening, when half the field was cleared, they were allowed to enter and glean the stray stalks of corn, and Carola could no longer keep herself away from them. The thin film of school-girl shyness which had crept over her during the last three years was dispersed at once. Bare headed, as she had been used to run about the streets of London, she stepped out of her cottage, and crossed over into the crowded corn-field. The old impulse to be in the front of any gathering of her fellow-creatures was astir again.

It was a very busy hour, for the sun would be setting soon, and though there would be a long twilight under the harvest moon, night would be come before the field was cleared. The village folk had little time for more than a word and a smile as their new schoolmistress passed to and fro, helping the feeblest and the youngest to make up their tiny shocks of corn. Babies, wrapped up in cloaks and shawls, were lying under the hedge, most of them sleeping with their thumbs in their little mouths; but Carola came upon one that was fretting with low, languid wailing and sobs, unheard

by its busy mother. She picked it up with a strange thrill of tenderness, for oh! how long it was since she held a baby in her arms! Soothing it very gently, she strayed on towards a closed gate, over which she could see the setting sun going down in a clear sky, with a soft green light lying all around it. Almost unconsciously to herself, Carola's sweet ringing voice was heard over the busy corn-field, singing as the lark she had listened to in the morning had sung:

"Glory to Thee, my God, this night,
For all the blessings of the light."

The first two lines she sang alone, standing with the glow of the setting sun shining on her uplifted face; but then the familiar hymn was taken up by the deep voices of the men at the waggon, and the women who were gleaned lifted themselves up to join in it, and the children shouted it out with delight. A finely solemn feeling fell upon them all; it was almost like being in church the women said to one another afterwards. When the hymn was ended, and the new schoolmistress came down the field again, still carrying the baby in her arms, she had won the hearts of all who were there.

Hazelmount was so small a village, that the news of what the young schoolmistress was like, and how she had sung the evening hymn in the corn-field, spread throughout it that evening. The men who carried in the last load spoke of it to Mrs. Arnold, of the Grange, as they sat slowly eating their supper, which had been spread for them on a long table in the farm-yard under her own superintendence. She had been too much occupied all day to pay her intended visit to the new schoolmistress, whose cottage had been made ready for her by herself and her servants the day before. The coming of a schoolmistress was always a little event in Hazelmount; and what the men said of her heightened Mrs. Arnold's curiosity. But her husband and her son would tell her more when they came in from the field.

They came in shortly after their harvesters. Both of them were tall, strong, handsome men, with a masterful air about each of them, as if there was no one with any right to dispute their authority. The son stooped down to kiss his mother, and she stroked his arm with her hands fondly.

"Well! and what is our Miss Fielding like?" she asked, somewhat eagerly; "and what is this I hear about you all singing 'Glory to Thee' together in the field?"

"She's as pretty a young maiden as any twenty miles round," answered her husband, "and she sang the hymn as naturally as a bird. She was singing to a baby she'd picked up under the hedge, and it sounded so hearty and so true we couldn't help joining in. It seemed just a right thing to do, and not a soul of us but was the better for it. We'll get her to sing for us at the Harvest Home."

"And what do you think of her, Philip?" asked Mrs. Arnold.

"Oh, she has a good voice," he answered carelessly.

But he did not tell his mother that he could still see Carola standing bare-headed, with her rapt face towards the setting sun, singing out of the pure gladness of her heart; and that the sweet, joyous tones of her voice were still ringing in his ears. She had not noticed him among his men; how should she, when he was working as hard as any, in a dress very little different? But he should not get the thought of her out of his head until he had seen her again.

CHAPTER IX.—HAZELMOUNT.

The little hamlet of Hazelmount was not altogether a common country village. It lay at the gates of Hazelmount Park, and every cottage in it was built in a picturesque style, and surrounded by pretty gardens, that the eyes of the owners of the park, or those of their numerous guests, should not fall upon anything to shock them. There was no public-house in it, and only one little shop, in a cottage down a by-lane. The parish church was a mile away, but there was a highly decorated private chapel at the Hall, the road to which ran through the park and past the village school; with a chaplain's house half-way between the Hall and the school. Hazelmount was built at the end of a long inland cliff of red sandstone, with the fresh air of thousands of meadows blowing across it whichever way the wind blew. There was no town nearer to it than Market Upton, which was seven miles away, and which was only a small country town numbering five or six thousand inhabitants. No manufacturing were within thirty or forty miles of it, and the nearest railway station was four miles away.

The Arnolds of the Grange had lived there from generation to generation. The Hall and the estate had passed away from the old family of the Hazelmounts, and had been bought by a rich manufacturer, whose widow, Mrs. Stewart, was still in possession of them. But the Arnolds, though tenant farmers only, held their old farm, with no fear of being disturbed, and inscribed their names in the parish register as their forefathers had done for hundreds of years back. It was the same with many of their labourers whose names, usually attested by a cross, could be traced in the register of births, marriages and deaths, as far back as the name of the Arnolds. The labourers who tilled the fields and tended the cattle lived and died, like their masters, under the same old roof-tree beneath which they were born. The ancient half-timber farm-house, with its independent cottages, was like a strong old oak, with its branches? and the human beings dwelling in them came and passed by as the leaves came and went in their seasons.

It might have seemed, but for the sweet winds blowing all about it, that the air of the little hamlet was heavy and tainted with the deaths of so many untold generations of men and women; and that the cottages, so often visited by the last enemy, would strike a chill like that of a tomb; but the dead were as much forgotten as last summer's leaves. The sun shone as merrily for those who were in the land of the living, and the corn grew as thickly in the furrows where so many departed forefathers had sown and reaped; and the thick trees sheltered the harvesters as kindly; and the earth and all that is therein was as fresh and fruitful and as joyous as it had ever been in earlier and younger times.

The very core and heart of the little hamlet was the Grange; and the rulers of all its concerns and affairs were the Arnolds. There was no other farm in it, and Mr. Arnold was looked