

## Choice Literature.

CAROLA.

BY HESHA STRETTON.

CHAPTER XXIV.—SISTER ELIZABETH.

And now Carola was utterly alone in the world. The long summer days dragged slowly away; for there was no longer any claim upon her for loving service. It seemed useless to prepare meals when there was no one but herself to sit down to them, and she ate such food as gave her the least trouble, just as she had been wont to snatch a crust of bread in her childhood, eating it in any corner where she could find a seat. A little of the wildness of that time returned to her as she rambled aimlessly about the fields and the rough uncleared lands, where pollard-trees stood, quaintly misshapen among the hedgerows. She was living again in her mind through the various changes that had come to her; and in her listless saunterings to and fro, the thought of George Bassett's death began to bear undue terror and depression to her. It was a horrible thing to have borne fatal witness against a fellow creature.

To go in and out of her house; to lie down and sleep, to rise up and work only for herself, with no face to look upon, and no voice answering hers, was insupportable to her. Yet she wanted some indication as to what her Lord would have her to do. Quite literally she believed the words He had said, "As thou hast sent me into the world so have I also sent them into the world." She did not think He meant only those disciples who followed Him in His lifetime on earth. She took it for granted that Jesus Christ had sent her into the world; and if so, what was the work He required her to do?

But no sign of His will came to her; and after a while she began to frequent the cottages that lay scattered among the fields and lanes. It was a large parish, and the church was a long way off. There was no resident squire or any family wealthy enough to take the lead among the sparse population. The poor barren land was divided into small farms, giving employment to two or three labourers on each, whose wages were low, and whose houses were mere hovels. The best and brightest among the boys and girls deserted their native place as soon as they could earn their own living; leaving behind them the dull and lazy, or those of indifferent character, whose work was done grudgingly, and whose only recreation was drinking bad beer in the dreary and dirty little public-houses.

Carola tried to go amongst them as she had gone amongst the cottagers at Hazelmount, but they were altogether different from those contented and intelligent people. Here she was not made welcome in their comfortless hovels, and her visits were considered an intrusion. She had not any position or authority amongst them as she had at Hazelmount; and they could not understand any friendly advances made with no thought of personal advantage. Many of them looked upon her suspiciously, as a young woman living alone in a solitary cottage, with no visible means of subsistence. Only the little children and the very aged made friends with her; but her home was too far away for them to visit her, and only in the lanes could she play and talk with them, for in their own dwellings she was treated coldly as a suspicious stranger.

To speak to these people of what her heart was full of only provoked a stare of stupid astonishment or indifference. All that sort of talk was for the parson to say to them on their death-bed as a sort of charm to save them from going to a worse place than even this poor world was to them. It had nothing to do with those who could get through a day's work and draw their scanty wages at the week's end. Even the overworked curate who conducted the Sunday afternoon services in the small chapel of ease, considered her too open and enthusiastic in her religion for a churchwoman, and half imagined her a Methodist in disguise, though she regularly attended his ministrations now Matthias was gone. There was a mystery about her; and a mystery about a young and pretty woman is always to her discredit.

Carola was beginning to feel in her inmost heart this general listlessness and indifference creeping over her. Her soul was melting with heaviness. At Hazelmount the fervid and affectionate response which met more than half way every effort she made to endear herself to the parents of her scholars, had kept the flame burning very brightly on the altar of her own spirit. Her vivid, joyous sense of the reality of the Lord's life on earth, and the power of His words, had awakened in them an answering gladness. Her emotion had never failed to kindle theirs, and the result had been a gentle yet fervent excitement which had gilded all the dullness of every-day existence. But here, though she could get the people to complain of their own lot, or speak spitefully of their neighbours, they had no "thought" to utter about Him who had lived and died for them. And Carola was as one who tells an idle tale when she spoke of Him.

The loneliness of her position began to oppress her more and more heavily, yet still there came no sign as to what she ought to do. There was neither fiery nor cloudy pillar to guide her. The idle time hung wearisomely on her hands, and the often read story in the New Testament seemed at last but little more than words to her, over which her eye glanced without taking in their meaning. Was this the way in which Christians read the record of their Lord's history?

She resolved to quit this lonely place and useless life and go away, whither she knew not. It was a strange position to be in. It was impossible for her to go back among her own people in their deep misery and degradation for there would be danger, not for herself only, but for them, in their bitter hatred of her, lest any of them should be hurried into crime. "They will learn nothing that is good from you," the policeman had said; and she knew too well that she could not venture to dwell among them.

Yet she disposed of the little furniture she had bought, and made ready to go. The last morning was come and she was

sitting on her door-sill looking across the half-cleared land stretching before her, and watching the branches of the trees lifting themselves languidly in the soft autumn breeze, and shedding one by one their brown leaves, as if weary of their summer foliage, when she saw the letter-carrier plodding over the field in the direction of her cottage. He approached her garden wicket, and called out loudly "Miss Fielding." She ran down the narrow path, her heart throbbing violently, for she had not received half-a-dozen letters in her whole life, and here was one for her the very day she was going away. She did not recognize the handwriting; how should she when there was no friend's writing familiar to her? In a moment her thoughts flew to Hazelmount. Suppose it was Philip writing to her!

But no; that could not be. And then the next instant came the recollection that she had written to the ladies in whose school she had been educated at Matthias Levi's urgent desire, when he lay dying, telling them frankly her whole story, and asking for their counsel and friendship. Matthias had sent a special and pathetic message to them, but no answer came before his death, and Carola had scarcely thought about it since. When she had thought of it, it had only been with a feeling that they too considered her unworthy of their regard. But now the answer was here. They had gone out to New Zealand, and Carola's letter had followed them; they were replying to it hurriedly, but they bade her go to Nether-ton Hospital and enquire there for Sister Elizabeth, who would certainly befriend her. They were forwarding Carola's letter to her that she might know her whole history.

In a moment the heavy burden that had weighed so heavily on her heart had rolled off. Was it possible that she had ever fancied her Lord had forgotten her? The tears stood in her eyes as she thought of it, as though she had judged where she must go. She was ready; all she had to do was her dearest friend harshly. Here were His commands; this was to get to the nearest station, and make her way to Nether-ton, instead of London, whither she had vaguely intended to travel. The message came not an hour too soon, but not too late.

She gathered a bunch of autumn flowers to lay on the old Jew's grave as she passed the churchyard on her way to the station. The little mound was already grass-grown, and his body was sleeping beneath it, with his face still turned toward Jerusalem. Carola read her letter there in whispers, as if the deaf ear could perchance catch the answer to the message he had sent. Then she laid her head down for a minute or two on the cool turf, shedding a few tears—not unhappy ones, though she was going away, and might never see this quiet grave again. Matthias knew now who the Messiah was; he had seen Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.

It was evening when she reached a town in the Black Country. For some miles the railway had run through banks of smoking and burning slag, with here and there ponds of stagnant, drossy-looking water, and a few rows of pollard willows standing beside them. Blotches of dark-mouthed pits and all chimneys clamped with iron, and engines with their long cranks continually rising and falling, divided the landscape among them, whilst the setting sun was going down behind a thick canopy of smoke. Large skips ascended out of one pits with heavy loads, amid the clanking of chains, and mysterious metallic shrieks, and swung down again with a jarring clang into deep caverns underground.

"Can you tell me where the hospital is?" asked Carola, when the train left her behind at Nether-ton, and the busy porters had time to attend to her.

"Ah, I'll take you there," answered one of them; "I'm always glad of a chance to see Sister Elizabeth. She's been a rare good friend to me, and most on us. There's a many on us been in the Orspittle for one thing or another."

It was a small, plain, unpretending building, and the room in which Carola waited was bare and unadorned. Through the window she could see an extensive plain, thickly dotted over its whole extent with pits and engine-houses, and chimneys belching out volumes of smoke. It was easy to understand that there would be many accidents there, in that whirl of activity above ground and below. And Carola felt that she was come to take a share in this energetic swing of labour. She had found a home again, a place where she could work as Christ had worked on earth. There was a vast field for ministering to others before her; her passion for loving service would be satisfied here. No more lonely days and dreary, desolate thoughts for her. She could not do any great thing, but she could nurse the sick for her Lord's sake.

At last, when the night had fallen, the door opened, and there entered a tall, grave-looking, elderly woman, with clearly cut features and keen eyes, which surveyed Carola steadily. The girl had taken off her bonnet, as if she knew herself already at home, and she met her gaze of scrutiny with an eager, frank simplicity, free from either affectation or embarrassment. But she did not speak until Sister Elizabeth addressed her, with a smile stealing over her grave face.

"I know all about you," she said in a pleasant voice; "your governesses did wisely in sending me your letter, for there will be no feeling of concealment in your mind. And if you are like your letter, I shall find in you one who works for the Lord Jesus Christ, as I wish all about me to do. Are you willing to be only a servant, if I find you fitted for nothing else?"

"I shall be glad to be a servant here," answered Carola. "I'm young and very strong, and I can do anything you set me to do. I want to help to save life, not to destroy it," she said in a low tone, as her eyes filled with tears; "you know I once helped to destroy life."

"Yes," said Sister Elizabeth; "but if that dwells in your memory at all, it must make you more patient and more watchful if I make you a nurse. They are rough folks are my poor men and boys, and you must be cheerful among them, and as light hearted as possible. We must make them happy whilst they are with us, for many of them have hard lives elsewhere. I want no one here who does not work with all their heart and strength for Jesus Christ's sake."

You must not come because you are lonely, or sorrowful, or disappointed. Whatever you do, you must do it to the Lord."

"Oh, that is what I want!" cried Carola, eagerly. "I am not poor, you know; I have more money than I need, and you will not have to pay me any wages. If I could be all day long doing what my Lord would have me do! Something like what His mother and His sisters would do. And you make me feel as if you were something like them," she added, looking into Sister Elizabeth's grave and beautiful face with reverential eyes.

"Well, come," she answered with a smile, "I will take you through my wards."

It was a small hospital, with only three wards, containing ten beds each, and these were not all full, as it was set apart for accidents and surgical cases only. With a soft, steady step Carola walked through the long and lofty rooms, glancing with compassion and sympathy on the hard, rough faces just touched with the refining finger of illness, which were lifted for an instant as Sister Elizabeth and she passed by. Yes, here indeed was such work as her heart would delight in; for would not Christ have paced pityingly to and fro among them, perhaps healing one or another with His words or looks? She was glad she had strength to bring to the service of these helpless ones, glad that she could give her health to the ministry of the sick. If her Lord came, and called for her, she would not be ashamed for Him to find her there. And in some respects her early life had fitted her for this work. She had witnessed sickness and suffering under its coarsest and most repulsive aspects in the miserable and crowded dwelling places of the East end. There was none of that natural disgust and dismay to overcome, which is the first trial of a novice. These men and boys, disfigured and repulsive as some of them were, were as brothers to her—brothers whom she had known when she was young, and who were now thrown upon her sisterly pity and help. There was nothing she could not do for them, and already her brain was busy devising loving plans for the relief of their sufferings and the diversion of their thoughts from their sad condition.

When night came she went to her little narrow room, as small and as barely furnished as a cell in a nunnery. The red light of the blazing furnaces fell on its white walls, and the throbbing and clanging of hammers sounded all around her like the monotonous murmur of the sea beating against a shore. Over the head of the iron bedstead hung a symbol which Carola had never yet seen—a crucifix. She saw the outstretched hands, with the nails thrust through them, and the bowed head crowned with thorns, and the body drooping wearily with anguish on the cross; and she stood agape like one who comes suddenly upon a terrible and awful scene. The thought of her Lord's death was too vivid in her mind for her to look calmly on such a memorial of it. She could hardly read the record of it in the gospel; but to behold it thus set forth before her eyes was more than she could bear. She threw herself on her knees, and hid her face from it, weeping passionately, as Mary wept at the sepulchre when she found her Lord taken away, and she knew not where they had laid Him. "They crucified Him! they crucified Him!" she moaned again and again to herself, until at last she fell asleep, sobbing now and then as one that cannot be comforted; and Sister Elizabeth coming in softly about midnight found her on the floor, with tears upon her long eyelashes and her face pale and quivering as if she had been suffering profound grief.

(To be continued.)

### WICLIF'S ITINERANT PREACHERS.

How highly he valued the influence of the spoken Word, and how anxiously he sought to bring it before the people, is best known by his institution of Poor or Simple Priests. Possibly, as has been remarked, what was in interested quarters resented and resisted as an endeavour both to supplant the existing mendicant orders and to ignore the authority of the pope, might under different circumstances have resulted in the establishment of a new mendicant order, and in the beginning of a new Catholic revival. At the same time there must have been a combative element in Wiclif's priests, even before his own attitude had become one of general revolt. They seem to have gone forth from Oxford and more especially from Leicester (which is not far from Lutterworth), clad in long garments of red woollen, barefooted, and staff in hand. Their mission was to teach simple truths in simple words, declaring "God's law" in church or chapel when admitted to a pulpit, otherwise in the church-yards or public places. They must have tried the patience of many an honest priest anxious to do his duty by his "parishioners," like Chaucer's Poor Parson of a Town, into the picture of whom Chaucer is supposed to have introduced a feature or two of Wiclifite itinerant. Fettered, as far as we know, by no rules or restrictions, Wiclif's mission-men may have often had little to distinguish them from the mendicant friars but the voluntary nature of their daily self-denial. Like the friars, they no doubt often became the confidential friend of the lowly, sharing their sympathies, and very likely groaning with them over their grievances. These wandering preachers must have become less and less amenable to control, more especially when (in imitation perhaps of the example previously set by the Waldenses) even laymen were allowed to take part in the labours of the mission. No wonder that in the end the attempt was made (in May, 1382) by Archbishop Courtenay to extinguish the itinerants! The Lords consented to his proposal, but the Commons hesitated; and it was necessary to resort to an audacious manoeuvre for giving statutory power to a royal ordinance which had been obtained against the preachers.

This institution of Wiclif's connects itself with some of the most important efforts of his late career. From many points of view his translation of the Bible formed an indispensable complement of his previous activity, but it was, above all, an invaluable aid to his endeavour to make the truth in its unadorned undisguised simplicity, known throughout the land. He had long been specially distinguished by his exposition of Holy Scriptures at Oxford, where academic enthusiasm had