

Our Story.

BARBARA STREET.

A FAMILY STORY OF TO-DAY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "OUR NELL," "A SAILOR'S

DAUGHTER," ETC.

CHAPTER VII.

SHYLOCK.

WATERHOUSE was more sure this man had felt the pinch of poverty, and, perhaps, of other misfortunes, for he had seen enough of the world to be aware that prosperous men are not accustomed to find the universe out of gear. When they parted, Waterhouse said, "By the way, kindly take my new address with you. I am leaving here to-morrow, and shall then be staying at No. 47, Barbara Street, Lowerbury. Shall I write it down?"

"I shall remember it," said the young man, giving Waterhouse a surprised and curious look.

Though Waterhouse was, as we know, guilty in the matter of the sealskin jacket, Grace's prophecy that she would hear no more of it was not exactly justified by the event, fate being apt to show little regard for the reputation of quick-witted people.

When Waterhouse walked into his new domain, his satisfaction in having attained his end, and in the air of homely comfort the place wore, so grateful after the stately dreariness of his hotel, was considerably dashed by a discovery which had the effect of a sudden slap in the face where one is expecting to receive a smile. He was guilty of the boyishness of throwing the parcel on the floor with a muttered exclamation, and of giving it a vicious kick when there. But after a moment's reflection he picked it up again, and having placed it upon the table, he strode to the bell and rang it violently. Had he known it, this resounding peal, which was of a calibre quite different from the apologetic feminine rings she was accustomed to—although, indeed, she heard very few of these, for with a maid-of-all-work the bell is resorted to sparingly—sounded the note of very zealous service from Sarah.

It had at once a lordly and a wealthy sound with it, as if the ringer would brook no delay in having his wants administered to, and was prepared to enforce his demands with high words and half-crowns. So that fear and hope, those strongest factors among the springs of human action, were immediately set a-working in Sarah's breast.

When Waterhouse beheld the maid-servant at his door he said, "Take that parcel away, if you please."

"Into your bedroom, sir?"

"No, certainly not; it doesn't belong to me."

"Then what would you wish me to do with it, if you please, sir?"

Though her mistresses had naturally not taken Sarah into their confidence in the matter, it is not to be supposed that she was in any un-instructed condition concerning it; her eyes, ears, and fingers being not less curious than the generality of her class. Her feelings may be better imagined than described as Waterhouse replied—

"Anything you like—wear it yourself, if you choose."

By this speech Waterhouse certainly admitted the charge which had been thus silently and effectively brought against him; but in his mortification he sought no method of evading it. Nor was it of malicious intent that he thus bestowed on the servant the garment he had first offered to her mistress, though no method more calculated to spite her, as the children say, could have well been conceived. He simply took the first way that presented itself of getting rid of the offending garment.

By-and-by Sarah brought his dinner up. She had a method of her own in setting the table, which consisted chiefly in laying an article in two or three different places before she found the position which suited her, which position, by a kind of fatality, always chanced to be the one most inconvenient for the diner. She had received full instructions from Mrs. Norris—who knew about such things from past experience—as to how to "wait," and had just been primed by Grace, whom she had left hanging with a scorched face over the kitchen fire. So she put all the dishes and condiments just beyond Waterhouse's reach, and kept them there until he asked for them individually, as if he were a little boy in course of training to say "please." But Waterhouse made a very good dinner, a thing which it never occurred to him to feel grateful for. It was true enough that he could have made himself contented in a Kaffir hut, had he found himself there, but finding himself in an English sitting-room, he took it as a matter of course that his dishes should be varied, and well cooked. He had another visitation from Sarah when she brought him coffee, and the rest of the evening he spent in solitude. The house was very quiet. He had seen Mrs. Norris for a moment or so—of the sisters he had caught no glimpse. But quite early he heard several pairs of feet pass his door, and then sounds overhead. It was evident the household were going to bed. That was all very well for the first day—on the morrow he must make friends with the family.

But when the morrow came, and the day after that, and so on till nearly a week had slipped by, and he had never spoken to any one of the family except Mrs. Norris, it began to occur to Waterhouse that he had been rather a fool. His occasional interviews with Mrs. Norris, which occurred only when he found a pretext for requesting one, were of a chilling nature—as if one were to put out a warm living hand to be grasped, and were met by the soft cold touch of a velvet glove. He had seen in his comings-in and goings-out a young creature who was evidently the very daughter of this mother and who had bestowed upon him so slight a bead of the head that he had been half doubtful as to whether it was intentional or not; and once or twice a younger girl, who looked rather wild and shy, but certainly not dignified, and who had fled away like a startled deer. Of Grace he had never caught sight.

And the annoying part of the business was that after the first night, as if to enhance the silence and loneliness of his rooms, the rest of the household was as unsubstantially built as London houses usually are—was audibly full of life and merriment. In the morning he would hear lively voices in his sitting-room, but when he arrived there, he would find the breakfast-table drawn to the fire, the newspaper laid to his hand, the fire bright and glowing, but the lively voices gone. Then while he was at breakfast, he would hear them in his bedroom, and the rest of the day they would be here, there, and everywhere, except where he was; they were even hushed as they passed his door. It was as if he had lit upon one of those magic palaces where nothing more sub-

stantial than a vision of hands performs all needful services. Sarah, indeed, was very substantial, and quite unfairy-like; but since all she was seen to do was done so badly, it was hardly logical to suppose that all she was not seen to do was done so well. Besides, Sarah could not be supposed to laugh and talk by herself, allowing for any amount of sobering influence his presence might have over her. It was obvious that for a great part of the attentions he received, he was not indebted to that handmaiden. At last, Sunday arrived.

"What church does your mistress attend?" asked Waterhouse of Sarah at breakfast-time. He was on very friendly terms with Sarah by this time, for in solitary confinement a man has been known to make friends with a spider, in default of more congenial society.

"Well, sir, Miss Ester often goes to All Saints, but the rest goes to Saint Luke's, as the clergyman is a very good man like, by all I hear."

"How shall I find St. Luke's, if I want to attend service there this morning?"

"Why, sir, you can't miss your way! It's straight on and then turn to your right, to your left I mean, and then straight on again a bit, and down the street in front of you, and there's the church opposite."

On the strength of these lucid directions, Waterhouse set off for St. Luke's, and attended service there. In returning he overtook Grace, as he had hoped to do. She was walking alone with Kitty; her mother, not being well, had remained at home. Waterhouse, coming up behind, felt a sensation at once of amusement and pleasure as he recognized the small compact figure and elastic tread of his comrade of the fog.

"Good morning, Miss Norris," he said, stepping alongside and raising his hat.

"Good morning," said Grace, with no smile or sign of welcome.

"Why, I have not seen you," he said, with cheerful friendliness, "since I became an inmate of your house. Haven't you been at home?"

"Oh, yes!" adding, after a pause, with an indescribable stiffness, "I hope you have found your rooms comfortable."

"Perfectly so, thank you. Is this your youngest sister? Will you introduce me?"

"Yes; it is my sister Kate."

Kitty reddened and felt very uncomfortable, as Waterhouse took off his hat, and said—

"I have seen you on the stairs, Miss Kate, haven't I?"

She could only reply "Yes," in a mouse-like tone, and reddened still more. Why should Grace call her "Kate," and be so very cool and rude? It might be proper and dignified, but it was extremely uncomfortable; and Mr. Waterhouse had such a kind, pleasant face, though he was rather formidable, being so tall and bearded. Even mice probably have an opinion of their own; by which they may occasionally circumvent cats, though those superior animals might be surprised to hear it. But Kitty's opinion was of no practical value just then.

"Is that your dog, Miss Kate—that tawny fellow that I see chasing the cats in the back-yard? He amuses me uncommonly."

"Oh!" stammered Kitty; "it's all our dogs—I mean, it belongs to us all."

And then she reddened still more vividly, feeling she had disgraced herself. Grace could not resist the dawning of a smile, but she checked it; and Waterhouse, looking at her for merry response, saw the check. He felt hurt and annoyed, and, feeling that he was merely thrusting himself upon her, he muttered an excuse, and passed on, striding away with long rapid steps, that soon carried him out of sight. Why Grace should treat him with cold reserve now, when she had met him with charming friendliness as an entire stranger, was a problem he could not solve, not being at all read in feminine human nature. It must be, he reflected, that confounded jacket business that had spoiled his chance of making friends with these pleasant people! What if he apologized? But no; what could he say that would make better of it? The fact was, he had been a fool, and, if he could have done so with honour, he would have liked to throw up the whole affair at once, since, of course, it was simply for the sake of getting into some semblance of homely relations with the landlady and her family which had induced him to enter into it at all.

His friends were all asking what he meant by taking himself off into such barbaric regions, and he now asked himself the same question with some pungency. Why on earth should he settle himself in this squalid northern suburb, from which he could get nowhere without miles of cab-driving or railway travelling, his engagements being in quite another part of London?

He dined early in the usual solitude, with the sauce of a conversational murmur from the family dinner in the room below, and he remained in a very crusty mood during the afternoon. As the dusk began to gather, there came a scratching at his door, which was ajar, and he perceived it agitated slightly. He was just in the act of jumping up to let in the small quadruped which was evidently trying to push it open, when he heard an urgent whisper—

"Come away, pussy; come, you naughty cat!"

He opened the door on the instant, and discovered Kitty in the act of forcibly lifting up a large tabby cat, much against her will.

"And why is she a naughty cat, Miss Kate?" he asked, lifting his eyebrows, and at the same time opening his arms to receive the struggling pussy, who jumped into them without more ado.

The abashed Kitty, who felt that veracity was impossible, with the most abject shamefacedness replied almost inaudibly—

"I thought she would disturb you."

Waterhouse laughed rather sardonically. The idea of a cat being kept out of his room for fear she should disturb him, seemed, in his condition of utter boredom, to be grimly humorous.

(To be continued.)

A GOOD illustration of the way in which a harmless, and even kind saying, may grow and become intensely evil and injurious when gossip takes it up is furnished in the following:—Mrs. A. to Mrs. B.

"That Mrs. New-comer is so fond of her children. The other day when I called she was blowing soap-bubbles with them through a common clay pipe."

Mrs. B. to Mrs. C.—"That Mrs. New-comer is so funny. Mrs. A. saw her amusing her children with a common clay pipe."

Mrs. C. to Mrs. D.—"That Mrs. New-comer smokes a common clay pipe."

Mrs. D. to Mrs. E.—"That Mrs. New-comer smokes a horrid old pipe. I don't see how any woman in her sober senses could do that!"

Mrs. E. to Mrs. F.—"That Mrs. New-comer smokes a pipe and drinks awfully."—*Christian Instructor.*

SUNDAY EVENING WITH THE CHILDREN.

"He increased . . . in favour with God and man."—St. Luke.

If you had ever been to the Tower of London, you would have been sure to notice in one of the rooms the crowns of burnished gold and flashing gems which once encircled the brows of England's kings and queens. But crowns of gold and precious stones are the lowest kind of crowns; not real crowns at all, but only images of them. They are just what a painted picture of an apple is to the taste of the ripe, juicy fruit in your mouth—what a mere talk about the sea-side is to the real pleasure of paddling and sailing boats on the shore itself; they are only dead images of living things, of crowns worn by golden lives flashing with the precious light of jewel deeds—crowns seen only by the spirit, and bright with purity. These crowns are called in the Bible "crowns of glory." They grow out of the good, as the flowers grow out of the trees, and their wearers are kings and queens, the only kings and queens to God; God is their chief, and many, many children are amongst their number.

Chief among all crowned children was Jesus. His brow was always bright with noble deeds, and human hearts were always lighted by their jewelled beauty. Of course He lived with other children; and, doubtless, even in low, despised Nazareth there were parents who looked at times on what their children did with thankful pride, for

"E'en in the darkest spot on earth
Some love is found."

Doubtless, too, children's hearts were often filled with the sweet light of each other's kind and noble deeds. Returning from school and play, the boys and girls would make their narrow streets noisy with their merry voices—joining in some comrade's praise. Perhaps even some young names were named only to think of unselfishness, kindness, and truth. If so, chief amongst such, towering high above them all, was Mary's Son, Jesus. Of all their kith and kin and comrades, it was upon Him their joyful hearts bestowed their warmest praise. No school-fellow, no playmate, excited such genuine love and wonder. All simple hearts and true adored Him. His ineffable good temper, His noble way of taking wrong, His unwearied patience with the irritating, just carried the children out of themselves; and, now and again, I fancy I see them throw up their caps, clap their hands, and burst into glad hurrahs.

Where He was known best He was loved most. Boy as He was, His mother, positively revered Him and treasured His very words in her heart; and God, Who knew Him best of all, better than even His mother (as, happily, He knows us all), bestowed on Him most admiration and praise. So His youthful crown of glory was seen by both earth and Heaven. The boy was in favour with God and man.

And remember this, my child—it was just what made Him lovely and beautiful in the sight of God that made Him lovely and beautiful in the sight of man. Never think of Jesus—as like those puny, sickly, insipid children about whom books are written—who never lived, I am glad to think—whose piety is as sickly and puny and insipid as themselves; for whom God, if they had really ever lived, would have doubtless had plenty of pity, for He is very pitiful. Think of Him as a healthy, noble boy, Who lifted up His head "like a man," and Whose piety was as healthy and noble as Himself—on Whom God did not bestow pity, but admiration, and with Whom He was right well pleased; for just as Jesus grew to be the favourite of simple-minded folks in Nazareth, He grew to be the favourite of Heaven. Heaven does not lie far away, my children. All that Jesus was doing in home and school and street was known there; and it was what He was doing there that found God's favour. We cannot be one thing on our knees and another in our lives; nasty to simple-minded people about us and pleasant to God above.

But do not think, either, that Jesus found no difficulties in the way of His goodness. His crown had to be won, as such crowns always have. Do not fancy that it flashed in full glory amid a waiting throng of admiring friends. He "increased" in favour; His crown increased in clearness and glory as His body increased in height, little by little, day by day. The light He shed into people's hearts shone brighter and brighter. When a parent's hasty word provoked no insolent reply; when an unjust punishment of the schoolmaster extorted nothing but a feeling of genuine distress, when boys full of envy and passion in the playground awoke in Him a look and a tone which was brimful of pity, which, in spite of themselves, made them blush and subside in shame, when to bad and shameless fellows He was patient and kind—then was it that rarest jewels flashed upon His brow.

His parents were not likely to be perfect; His schoolmaster was even less likely still to be so, and the boys and girls of the streets were but boys and girls; while His brothers—well, the least you can say of them is that they seem to have been lower natured than He, and unworthy of Him. They might, as doubtless they did, like His good-heartedness; but they only liked it; they did not care to copy it. It was in conquering provocations to evil, with which such surroundings must have abounded, that He won and gemmed His glory-crown.

In some respects Nazareth was an easy place in which to win it, for it seems to have been a low, benighted village; and where there is badness everywhere, even a little goodness goes a long way; as when shining in a deep black sky, a little star seems large and clear. But though it is true that a good life would be far easier to see, if lived in such a place, it would at the same time be far harder to live. The easiest place in which to live a good life would be where there was nobody but yourself (and there it would be worthless); it would be less easy where there were none but fairly good people, and it would be the least easy of all where the people close to you were all bad. To be good there, pure, patient, truthful, and brave, and to be known as such, must be terrible work. And it was in surroundings like these that grew a glory-crown around the youthful brow of Jesus. He must have had enough to do; struggles to endure, prayers to say, temptations to fight, pains to suffer, tears to shed, but He did it all. God only knows how much it cost, amongst such neighbours, for a boy to win by mere goodness the crown He wore.

It is the mark of a Christian child that he is in intense sympathy with the aims of Jesus, and longs and tries to be like Him. He does not envy the golden circles which once rested on the brows of the Henrys and the Williams of England, now resting upon their cushions within the iron grating in the London tower, but he does covet, and with all his heart, the crown of Jesus.

Sabbath School Work.

LESSON HELPS.

(Selected from Piloulet.)

ESTHER'S PETITION.

LESSON XI., March 14th, Esther iv., 10-17: v., 1-3; memorize verses 1-3

GOLDEN TEXT.—"So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."—Esther iv., 16.

TIME.—B.C. 474, between Lessons 8 and 9. Thirty years before Nehemiah came to Jerusalem, our last lesson.

CHRONOLOGY.—The return from Babylon, B.C. 536. Temple rebuilt, 515. The great feast, 483. Esther's marriage, 478, 9. Esther's petition, 474.

PLACE.—Susa, or Susa, one capital of the Persian empire, 250 miles south-east of Babylon, 125 miles north of the Persian Gulf.

RULERS.—Xerxes (Ahasuerus), king of Persia, 485-465. The Republic of Athens. Themistocles and Leonidas in Greece.

PLACE IN THE BIBLE.—The story of Esther belongs in the interval of 58 years between the sixth and seventh chapters of Ezra.

BOOK OF ESTHER.—Author unknown, but a Persian Jew who lived about the time of the events described. It is a story of Divine Providence, without the name of God once in it, but God manifest everywhere in it.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.—The story must be read, but a few explanations are here given. *Why should God so care for the preservation of the Jews?* Because they were his missionaries to the heathen nations where they were scattered, and were preparing the way by the Word of the one God for the coming of His Son Jesus Christ. *Xerxes:* the Greek and common form of the name Ahasuerus is well known in ancient history. The feast mentioned in chap. i. was the one in which he proposed his great expedition into Greece, where he took 5,000,000 persons, and returned with 5,000. The expedition took place between the feast and the marriage of Esther: 10. *Esther* "a star." Her Hebrew name was Hadassah, "Myrtle." She could have been only 15 or 20 years old at her marriage. *Mordecai:* Esther's cousin and adopted father, a descendant of Kish, a Benjamite carried captive by Nebuchadnezzar, B.C. 598. 11. *There is one law of his:* rather for him, for all *Put to death:* this was to preserve the life of the king from those who might wish to kill him, and to save him much annoyance. *Golden sceptre:* a rod tipped and ornamented with gold. *ESTHER'S NAME:* (1) of death. The chances were against her. (2) The king seemed to have lost some of his attraction to her. (3) The king's decree, which could not be changed, was to be averted—a seeming impossibility. (4) His leading favourite was opposed to her. (5) She belonged to a despised race, and the king would now have to know it. 13. *Mordecai commanded:* he urges four arguments. (1) She will perish if she does not go. (2) She will lose not only her life, but the opportunity of doing a great service. (3) God will certainly deliver His people. (4) God had given her all the blessings she enjoyed for this very purpose. She would be carrying out God's plan. 1. *Put on royal apparel:* to appear as attractive as possible.

SUBJECTS FOR SPECIAL REPORTS.—The book of Esther.—Xerxes.—Esther.—Haman.—Mordecai.—The danger of God's people.—The heroism of Esther.—Haman's ambition and its fruits.—Mordecai's success compared with Haman's.—The deliverance of God's people.—Divine providence as seen in this story.

LEARN BY HEART.—Rom. viii., 28; Matt. vi., 33; Esther iv., 13-14

QUESTIONS.

INTRODUCTORY.—Did the story of Esther occur before or after the events of our last lesson? Where in the Bible history does this story belong? In what city did Esther live? What can you tell about Ahasuerus?

SUBJECT: A STORY OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

I. THE DANGER TO GOD'S PEOPLE.—Who was Mordecai? His character? Who was Haman? His character? Why was Haman angry with Mordecai? Why would not Mordecai bow down before him? Was he right in this? What did Haman do in revenge for this? What did he give the king for the privilege? How did he expect to get back this money?

II. QUEEN ESTHER'S HEROISM (vs. 10-17).—How did Queen Esther learn about this danger to her people? What did Mordecai wish her to do? What made this difficult and dangerous? How old was Esther? What reasons did Mordecai give why she should do it? How did she prepare for her dangerous duty? How did she accomplish it? What lessons do you learn from Queen Esther's conduct?

III. RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE.—What was the first step in Haman's fall? How was it accomplished at last? Was this justice? Do such things happen in our days? What lessons do you learn from Haman's career?

IV. DELIVERANCE.—What stood in the way of saving the Jews? (viii., 8.) How was their deliverance accomplished? Trace the workings of Providence in accomplishing this result. What promise was fulfilled? (Rom. viii., 28.) Why should God interfere to protect the Jews? What comfort and help can you gain from this story?

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

I. God puts us in our place for a special purpose. II. Ambition leads to pride, selfishness, and cruelty. III. Pride goes before a fall. IV. Difficulties in our way make heroism possible. V. Wisdom, piety, prudence, and courage are needed in God's work. VI. Goodness, faithfulness, piety, are the foundation of true success. VII. God will save His people because He has work for them to do in the world.

REVIEW EXERCISE.

(For the whole School in Concert.)

11. Who was Esther? Ans. A Jewish maiden who became the queen of Xerxes the Great. 12. What danger overtook God's people? Ans. Haman obtained permission to destroy them all. 13. How was that danger averted? Ans. By the heroism of Queen Esther, who braved death in their behalf. 14. What became of Haman? Ans. His pride and ambition led to his fall and death.