



"If any deed of mine can make
Some brother's load the lighter;
If any word of mine can make
Some brother's face the brighter—
God help me do that deed to-day,
Lest, waiting 'till to-morrow,
My brother shall have passed away,
And mine be greater sorrow."

A FAIR BARBARIAN.

BY FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT

CHAPTER XX.—Continued.

"You know Miss Octavia Bassett well, I suppose," remarked Barold, with condescension, as they passed through the gate. "You clergymen are fortunate fellows."

"I wish that others knew her as well, sir," said the little gentleman, kindling. "I wish they knew her—her generosity and kindness of heart and ready sympathy with misfortune!"

"Ah!" commented Mr. Barold, twisting his mustache with somewhat of an incredulous air. "This was not at all the sort of thing he had expected to hear. For his own part, it would not have occurred to him to suspect her of the possession of such desirable and orthodox qualities."

"There are those who—misunderstand her," cried the curate, warming with his subject, "who misunderstand, and—yes, and apply harsh terms to her innocent gayety and freedom of speech: if they knew her as I do, they would cease to do so."

"I should scarcely have thought"—began Barold.

"There are many who scarcely think it,—if you will pardon my interrupting you," said the curate. "I think they would scarcely believe it if I felt at liberty to tell them, which I regret to say I do not. I am almost breaking my word in saying what I cannot help saying to yourself. The poor under my care are better off since she came, and there are some who have seen her more than once, though she did not go as a teacher or to reprove them for faults, and her way of doing what she did was new to them, and perhaps much less serious than they were accustomed to, and they liked it all the better."

"Ah!" commented Barold again. "Flannel under-garments, and—that sort of thing."

"No," with much spirit, "not at all, sir; but what, as I said, they liked much better. It is not often they meet a beautiful creature who comes among them with open hands, and the natural, ungrudging way of giving which she has. Sometimes they are at a loss to understand, as well as the rest. They have been used to what is narrower and more—more exacting."

"They have been used to Lady Theobald," observed Barold, with a faint smile.

"It would not become me to—mention Lady Theobald in any disparaging manner," replied the curate; "but the best and most charitable among us do not always carry out our good intentions in the best way. I dare say Lady Theobald would consider Miss Octavia Bassett too readily influenced and too lavish."

"She is as generous with her money as with her diamonds, perhaps," said Barold. "Possibly the quality is peculiar to Nevada. We part here, Mr. Poppleton, I believe. Good-morning."

CHAPTER XXI.

Lord Lansdowne.

One morning in the following week Mrs. Burnham attired herself in her second-best black silk, and, leaving the Misses Burnham practicing diligently, turned her steps toward Oldclough Hall. Arriving there, she was ushered into the blue drawing-room by Dobson, in his character of footman; and in a few minutes Lucia appeared.

When Mrs. Burnham saw her, she assumed a slight air of surprise. "Why, my dear," she said, as she shook hands, "I should scarcely have known you."

And, though this was something of an exaggeration, there was some excuse for the exclamation. Lucia was looking very charming, and several changes might be noted in her attire and appearance. The ugly twist had disappeared from her delicate head; and in its place were soft, loose waves and light puffs; she had even ventured on allowing a few ringed locks to stray on to her forehead; her white morning-dress no longer wore the trade-mark of Miss Chickie, but had been remodelled by someone of more taste.

"What a pretty gown, my dear!" said Mrs. Burnham, glancing at it curiously. "A Watteau plait down the back—isn't it a Watteau plait?—and little ruffles down the front, and pale pink bows. It is quite like some of Miss Octavia Bassett's dresses, only not so over-trimmed."

"I do not think Octavia's dresses would seem over-trimmed if she wore them in London or Paris," said Lucia bravely. "It is only because we are so very quiet, and dress so little in Slowbridge, that they seem so."

"And your hair!" remarked Mrs. Burnham. "You drew your idea of that from some style of hers, I suppose. Very becoming, indeed. Well, well! And how does Lady Theobald like all this, my dear?"

"I am not sure that"—Lucia was beginning, when her ladyship interrupted her by entering.

"My dear Lady Theobald," cried her visitor, rising, "I hope you are well. I have just been complimenting Lucia upon her pretty dress, and her new style of dressing her hair. Miss Octavia Bassett has been giving her the benefit of her experience, it appears. We have not been doing her justice. Who would have believed that she had come from Nevada to improve us?"

"Miss Octavia Bassett," said my lady sonorously, "has come from Nevada to teach our young people a great many things,—new fashions in duty, and demeanor, and respect for their elders. Let us hope they will be benefited."

"If you will excuse me, grandmamma," said Lucia, speaking in a soft, steady voice, "I will go and write the letters you wished written."

"Go," said my lady with majesty; and having bidden Mrs. Burnham good-morning, Lucia went.

If Mrs. Burnham had expected any explanation of her ladyship's evident displeasure, she was doomed to disappointment. That excellent and rigorous gentlewoman had a stern sense of dignity, which forbade her condescending to the confidential weakness of mere ordinary mortals. Instead of referring to Lucia, she broached a more commonplace topic.

"I hope your rheumatism does not threaten you again, Mrs. Burnham," she remarked.

"I am very well, thank you, my dear,"

said Mrs. Burnham; "so well, that I am thinking quite seriously of taking the dear girls to the garden-party, when it comes off."

"To the garden-party!" repeated her ladyship. "May I ask who thinks of giving a garden-party in Slowbridge?"

"It is no one in Slowbridge," replied this lady cheerfully. "Someone who lives a little out of Slowbridge,—Mr. Burmestone, my dear Lady Theobald, at his new place."

"Mr. Burmestone!"

"Yes, my dear; and a most charming affair it is to be, if we are to believe all we hear. Surely you have heard something of it from Mr. Barold."

"Mr. Barold has not been to Oldclough for several days."

"Then, he will tell you when he comes, for I suppose he has as much to do with it as Mr. Burmestone."

"I have heard before," announced my lady, "of men of Mr. Burmestone's class securing the services of persons of established position in society when they wished to spend their money upon entertainments; but I should scarcely have imagined that Francis Barold would have allowed himself to be made a party to such a transaction."

"But," put in Mrs. Burnham rather eagerly, "it appears that Mr. Burmestone is not such an obscure person, after all. He is an Oxford man, and came off with honors: he is quite a well-born man, and gives this entertainment in honor of his friend and relation, Lord Lansdowne."

"Lord Lansdowne!" echoed her ladyship, sternly.

"Son of the Marquis of Lauderdale, whose wife was Lady Honora Erroll."

"Did Mr. Burmestone give you this information?" asked Lady Theobald with ironic calmness.

Mrs. Burnham colored never so faintly, "I—that is to say—there is a sort of acquaintance between one of my maids and the butler at the Burmestone place; and, when the girl was doing Lydia's hair, she told her the story. Lord Lansdowne and his father are quite fond of Mr. Burmestone, it is said."

"It seems rather singular to my mind that we should not have known of this before."

"But how should we learn? We none of us know Lord Lansdowne, or even the marquis. I think he is only a second or third cousin. We are a little—just a little set in Slowbridge, you know, my dear; at least, I have thought so sometimes lately."

"I must confess," remarked my lady, "that I have not regarded the matter in that light."

"That is because you have a better right to—to be a little set than the rest of us," was the amiable response.

Lady Theobald did not disclaim the privilege. She felt the sentiment an extremely correct one. But she was not very warm in her manner during the remainder of the call, and, incongruous as such a statement may appear, it must be confessed that she felt that Miss Octavia Bassett must have something to do with these defections on all sides, and that garden-parties, and all such swervings from established Slowbridge custom, were the natural result of Nevada frivolity and freedom of manners. It may be that she felt remotely that even Lord Lansdowne and the Marquis of Lauderdale were to be referred to the same reprehensible cause, and that, but for Octavia Bassett, Mr. Burmestone would not have been educated at Oxford and have come off with honors and have turned out to be related to respectable people, but would have remained in appropriate obscurity.

"I suppose," she said afterward to Lucia, "that your friend Miss Octavia Bassett is in Mr. Burmestone's confidence, if no one else has been permitted to have that honor. I have no doubt she has known of this approaching entertainment for some weeks."

"I do not know, grandmamma," replied Lucia, putting her letters together, and gaining color as she bent over them. She was wondering, with inward trepidations what her ladyship would say if she knew the whole truth,—if she knew that it was her granddaughter, and not Octavia Bassett, who enjoyed Mr. Burmestone's confidence.

"Ah!" she thought, "how could I ever dare to tell her?"

The same day Francis Barold sauntered up to pay them a visit; and then, as Mrs. Burnham had prophesied, Lady Theobald heard all she wished to hear, and, indeed, a great deal more.

"What is this I am told of Mr. Burmestone, Francis?" she inquired. "That he intends to give a garden-party, and that Lord Lansdowne is to be one of the guests, and that he has caused it to be circulated that they are cousins?"

"That Lansdowne has caused it to be circulated—or Burmestone?"

"It is scarcely likely that Lord Lansdowne"—

"Beg pardon," he interrupted, fixing his single glass dexterously in his right eye, and gazing at her ladyship through it. "Can't see why Lansdowne should object. Fact is, he is a great deal fonder of Burmestone than relations usually are of each other. Now, I often find that kind of thing a bore; but Lansdowne doesn't seem to. They were at school together, it seems, and at Oxford too; and Burmestone is supposed to have behaved pretty well towards Lansdowne at one time, when he was rather a wild fellow—so the father and mother say. As to Burmestone causing it to be circulated, that sort of thing is rather absurd. The man isn't a cad you know."

"Pray don't say 'you know,' Francis," said her ladyship. "I know very little but what I have chanced to see, and I must confess I have not been prepossessed in Mr. Burmestone's favor. Why did he not choose to inform us?"

"That he was Lord Lansdowne's second cousin, and knew the Marquis of Lauderdale, grandmamma?" broke in Lucia, with very pretty spirit. "Would that have prepossessed you in his favor? Would you have forgiven him for building the mills, on Lord Lansdowne's account? I—I wish I was related to a Marquis," which was very bold indeed.

"May I ask," said her ladyship, in her most monumental manner, "when you became Mr. Burmestone's champion?"

CHAPTER XXII.

"You Have Made It Liveller."

When she had become Mr. Burmestone's champion, indeed! She could scarcely have told when, unless, perhaps, she had fixed the date at the first time she had heard his name introduced at a high tea, with every politely opprobrious epithet affixed. She had defended him in her own mind then, and felt sure that he deserved very little that was said against him, and very likely nothing at all. And the first time she had seen and spoken to him, she had been convinced that she had not made a mistake, and that he had been treated with cruel injustice. How kind he was, how manly, how clever, and how well he bore himself under the popular adverse criticism! She only wondered that anybody could be so blind and stupid and wilful as to assail him.

(To be continued.)