

Our Story.

BARBARA STREET.

A FAMILY STORY OF TO-DAY.
BY THE AUTHOR OF "OUR NELL," "A SAILOR'S
DAUGHTER," ETC.

CHAPTER II.

NO. 47 BARBARA STREET.

ON the other side of the door Grace was received by Kitty, her youngest sister, a shock-headed maiden of fourteen years, who ushered her with much excitement into the sitting-room, opening to the right out of the narrow front passage. It was a double parlour of the ordinary London street folding-door kind, and was crowded with furniture, which had once been handsome, but was now shabby and old-fashioned. There were two occupants of the room—a tall girl was coming forward to welcome the new-comer, while in an easy-chair by the fire reclined a dignified-looking woman of middle age. Grace was greeted with a burst of exclamations and questions, but without replying to any of them, she walked up to her mother's chair, and kneeling before it, said, with a deliberate air—

"Now, mother, I know what you'll say, and I don't intend to take the slightest notice of it."
Here she took her mother's soft white hands in hers, and beat them gently upon her lap to give emphasis to her words.

"I intend to go into town every day by myself, get caught in a fog whenever I like, and come home in a cab with a strange gentleman on the box as often as I choose."

Kitty, her round eyes opening wide, cried—
"Mercy, Grace, what do you mean? has all that happened to you? What fun!"

While Grace examined her mother's face, where she discovered the expected commingling of consternation and indulgent affection.

"Saucy child! I tell me all about it at once," said Mrs. Norris, in a voice as mellow and subdued as her daughter's was firm and piquant.

But Grace rose from her knees and threw off her hat, saying, with a sigh—

"Oh, you cruel people, how can you ask me a single question when I have such a headache, and have had no tea? Kitty, how dare you make eyes at my parcels? I will show you everything by-and-by. An, my children, you little know what it has cost me to gratify your foolish desires! Never ask me to bring you roses again."

"Oh, Grace," said Kitty, "I am sure I never asked you to bring me a rose, and I don't think Hester did—did you, Hester?"

The elder sister laughed.
"Grace's roses are metaphorical," said Hester.
"Then why does she say metaphorical things?" asked Kitty, aggrieved.

Grace now ran to take off her jacket and boots, and presently returned looking as trim and neat as though she had just performed her morning toilet, a little heavy-eyed perhaps, but otherwise as fresh as a lark. This simile suggests itself, because Grace Norris had so many bird-like qualities. Light and strong and small, she seemed an embodied will, and though you loved her you would do more have sought to touch her than you would that little bird which might, if it chose, thrill you with joy by alighting on your hand, but would, according to all precedent, prefer to hop away lightly, and glance at you with bright defiance from a distance. Thus, though her family had been in real anxiety concerning her for the last two or three hours, and were delighted to see her return safe and sound, they did not hang round her with affectionate caresses or ministrations, and Kitty, who, it was plainly to be seen, was her willing slave, did not offer to unbutton her jacket or take off her boots.

Now, were Grace's portrait to be here drawn according to the usual fashion, as "item, two lips, indifferent red; two grey [or rather, brown] eyes, with lids to them, and so forth," an inadequate and probably an altogether erroneous idea would be gathered from it as to her appearance. Nor if it were added that her complexion was neither noticeably good or bad, being brownish, pale and clear; that her mouth, not small, was of a self-sufficing order, but redeemed from any suspicion of hardness by an upward curve suggesting kindly humour; that her eyes, according to circumstances, looked like quiet green-brown pools, or sent the light dashing back at every point, or glowed deeply dark; that her dress was always refined, but for the most part unnoticeable, which is perhaps the highest merit attainable where dress has to be regulated according to principles of the severest economy; and that the general compactness of her appearance was enhanced by the mouse smoothness of her well-shaped head, upon which the black hair was plaited close; these details would scarcely help the imagination. Grace's physical self was neither plain nor beautiful—it was insignificant. But in its very insignificance lay its charm, for this physical self was a mere envelope—an almost transparent envelope, through which her inner mental self expressed itself. We look at most people and find it difficult to realise that buried down within the clay is a bright immaterial essence, and we watch at the chinks and outlets of the prison-house for traces of that hidden soul; but in Grace Norris it appeared almost startlingly evident that a spirit had taken to itself a body, and one that should as little as possible disguise or fetter it.

But while we have been attempting to describe the indescribable, Sarah, the maid-of-all-work, has come up from the kitchen regions with the tea tray. She is a large melancholy-looking woman, with a curious looseness about her personal appearance, as of a lack of proper cohesion in her joints, which has communicated itself to her attire.

"Now, Sarah," said Grace, "do let me have the bread trencher with plenty of finger-marks upon it; you know I cannot get my tea comfortably without them."

Sarah's dingy melancholy face brightened into smiles. She retired precipitately, holding her hand before her mouth, and exploded behind the door.

"That was an unfortunate remark, Grace," said Hester, smiling; "Sarah will keep you waiting half an hour while she scrubs the trencher."

"Never mind; I would a great deal rather wait a hundred years than eat my bread from such a trencher as she brought up last night."

"I have spoken about it several times," said Mrs. Norris, with a gentle sigh.

And Hester said—
"And so have I, very strongly, mamma; but of course it remains for Grace to succeed where the rest of us fail. I should not be surprised to see it snowy-white in future."

Grace glanced at her sister a little gravely.
"It is simply because I have a trick of making her laugh, and she likes that—the poor soul is so low-spirited. Mother, I shall have a poached egg with my tea. Kitty, get me my cooking apron—there's a duck. No, Hester, don't offer, because you might spoil it, and then I should be cross."

When at length Grace was comfortably seated, she began—
"Now, while I drink my tea, do tell me all that has happened while I've been away. You can't think how long it seems since I left home!"

"I'm sure it seems a very long time to me," said Kitty, with a rather glum air. "The house is watched when you are out of it."

"Kitty, Kitty; that is complimentary to us," said her mother.
Grace looked at Hester rather anxiously.

"Oh! it's the German grammar that renders Kitty's life a burden to her. Wait till you're out of Hester's educational hands, little miss, and come into mine. When I am in course of instructing you how to make beds and puddings, you'll not be quite so fond of my society."

"Oh! won't it be fun! I shall like it!"
"No, that you won't, I can assure you. Good Monsieur Cobweb, has Monsieur Mustardseed worried you very much to-day over the lessons?"

"Monsieur Peasblossom, that question I will leave my pupil to answer."

"Hester, I won't be called Peasblossom! it is not at all appropriate, and the other names are."

"It is very appropriate. I will appeal to mother. Mother, don't you think Grace is just like Peasblossom?"

"Not at all," interrupted Grace. "I am not a sweet fragrant girl—a girl like a rose. Our neighbour at No. 45, now, might be called Peasblossom."

"It is not your appearance, but your character which justifies the name."

"Oh, if it is character, why there's more vinegar than honey in me."

"Oh, girls, girls, you seem to me to quarrel a great deal," said Mrs. Norris. "Why should you give your sister a nickname, Hester?"

The girls laughed.
"Why, mother," said Hester, "Grace dubs us afresh every day, only her names stick, and mine don't, and success is never reprehensible."

"My dear queen-mother," said Grace, "your children never quarrel; they dispute. But I have not heard what has happened to my family in my absence."

"You know nothing ever happens to us," replied Hester.

"What, does not Sarah break crockery, or the little boy at the back throw stones at our windows, or Pussy steal the neighbours' pigeons, or Pan, you naughty, naughty dog, don't you ever steal bones from the butcher's shop, or run away from your mistresses, and get lost?"

Pan, a small tawny roquet terrier, so surmamed by Grace by reason of his goatly hind-legs, who was begging for bread, looked embarrassed under this rebuke, and finally dropped on his four paws, and came a little nearer for comfort. When, however, a supplicating mew was heard through the door, Pan pricked up his ears uneasily. Kitty ran to open it, and a handsome stately tabby cat, accompanied by a little white kitten, was admitted. The cat, with a mew of pleasure, jumped into Grace's lap, and she stooped and picked up the kitten; and placed it on her shoulder, where it seemed quite at home. Pan retired with his tail down, but with an air as of proud disgust, and lay down under a chair, sighing.

When the tea-tray was removed, Grace, according to promise, told the history of her adventures very lightly and briefly, and without more than glancing at her mother's face. For she dreaded to see upon it an expression she very well knew, which showed that its habitual impassiveness was merely a mask, and had not its source in established content. When Mrs. Norris at last spoke, it was in tones so different from her ordinary languidly smooth ones that, had not her listeners been used to the change, it would have startled them.

"This is dreadful!" she said, abruptly.
"Dreadful, mother! I enjoyed the fun of it extremely."

"It is dreadful that my daughter should be subjected to indignities like these, and to favours like these, for I hardly know which is worse."

Mrs. Norris sat back in her chair and was silent, employing her fingers in knitting rapidly. Her face, still a handsome one, wore ordinarily a coldness, such as will often result from the habitual repression of immoderate feeling; at such times her dark eyes would appear gentle and expressionless, but when, as now, an emotion mastered her, her soft voice would be harshly broken, her face work distressedly, and her eyes show a wild pain gleaming through them. Her children were used to these sudden emotional storms, and knew that as a rule they died away as suddenly as they had sprung up.

"And was he handsome?" asked Kitty, who, seated on the hearthrug at Grace's feet with Pan curled up on her lap, was kept in a high state of gratification throughout the recital.

"Handsome indeed! Perhaps you have heard that handsome is as handsome does."

"I don't see why you should never answer me plainly," said Kitty, plaintively.

"Why, I answered you handsomely, Kitty, and that is surely better."

"Shocking," cried Hester, shaking her head reprovingly.

"I wonder if you will ever see him again," continued Kitty.

"Let us trust not, Kitty; it would be very dangerous, for he is the man I would marry without a moment's hesitation."

"Grace!" came from Mrs. Norris, in a deeply remonstrant voice.

"Yes, I would, mother, that very minute. Why not? A man who could behave so nicely, and had so much money to throw away!"

"Oh, Grace, you that always say you never would marry anybody, and that think men are horrid!"

The Pulpit.

SUNDAY EVENING WITH THE CHILDREN.

WORLDLINESS.

BY REV. BENJAMIN WAUGH.

"I see not the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."—St. John.

WHEN we would avoid a thing, we must know what and where it is. Now, the Bible tells

us to avoid worldliness; so we should know what worldliness is—the love of the world, as St. John calls it—and where it is to be seen: for it is at the bottom of all kinds of evil and wrong, and even boys and girls can be worldly. What, then, is worldliness?

Well, mark this. It is not loving the glorious world of field and sky, fair in the rainbows and blossoms of the summer, scarcely less fair in the sparkling frost and snow of winter; fair in the sunny day, fair in the moonlight night—a mind that does not love these is blind, and foolish, and sinful. Nor is worldliness loving the people in the world—father, mother, sister, brother, and little baby. Not to love these and a great many more people besides these would be base and bad; they were all made to love and to be loved.

I can best show you what worldliness is, and why the Bible dalks it so, by telling you a story of two boys who were at the same school, and were both learning to swim. One of them, Edward, had for several terms carried off the swimming prize, and you may guess the pride and self-consciousness of the boy who was first in swimming in his school. He was fully fourteen. The other, Walter, had only just entered the school, and little did anyone think he would ever make any mark in the water, much less win the other boy's place, for he was smaller, weaker, and two years younger—he was turned twelve. But many things do not happen as they are expected, and at the very next swimming competition, to everybody's astonishment, this younger boy actually entered the lists, swam, and beat the older one, and will beat him too, and of course he took the prize. All the boys agreed that nobody had ever cut a swifter, more graceful figure in the water, and when he had finished they gave such an honest, hearty cheer as boys only can. I said "all" did this. No! not all—but one, and that one the boy whose honours had been taken away. He had been first, and he had made sure of being first again; so you may imagine the vexation of his defeat. His pride was mortified; he could not stand it. Had the winner been bigger or older than he, then he might have put up with it, and let the matter pass; but as the winner was younger, weaker, shorter, the elder boy fretted and chafed—was resentful and wretched. The poor fellow fell into temptation, the temptation to be unjust and unkind and untrue. He told his school-fellows that he was crampy and out of sorts at the competition, a disgraceful excuse, for it was not true: he was never better. The fact is, he wanted to take away from the honour of the new boy. He began to hate him, and made up his mind that he owed him a grudge, and would one day pay him out.

The opportunity came. One morning, returning from a dip in the sea, Edward happened to meet Walter—who, with some school-fellows, was on his way to the shore for a dip too—and with a bland smile on his face, but downright hatred in his heart, he said, "I've done a splendid thing this morning, Walter—I've rounded the harbour buoy"; and then Walter proceeded to the shore in a state of no small astonishment at Edward's wonderful achievement. "Well," said Walter, "if he can, I can." They were soon stripped, and Walter, the only good swimmer of the party, shot out alone towards the buoy, which he could see yonder away off the harbour mouth, round which Edward had swum. But this buoy was farther than it seemed, and when Walter had reached it he felt weary, and when he had rounded it and had his head to shore, he felt himself falling. And his swim back was against both wind and tide, so he soon began to sink, and sobbed out, "Help! oh, help!" But not a boy in the company heard him; the wind blew his voice back from the shore. And had they heard him, not one of them could have come to his rescue; they were far too poor swimmers for such a work.

But, fortunately, the wind which blew the poor lad's cry from the shore, to which he had tried to send it, carried it out to sea to a passing boat. A few strokes more of the oars, and that boat would have been out of hearing, and Walter must have gone down, and in a few hours more there would have been washed ashore the body of a drowned boy.

But the boatmen heard, and rowing up to where the cry came from, one seized Walter, gruffly enquiring, as he lifted him out of the water, "What are you doing here?" and Walter, shivering and chattering with cold, exhaustion, and fear, at length told him as best he could that Edward had done it, and he thought he could have done it too. "Don't you believe a word of it. He did no such thing, I know. Take my advice, and don't you be trying it again till you're a man," said the boatman; and they were soon at the bathing-place.

And the boatman was right; Edward had not done it, and, to do him justice, when he told his slippant falsehood, he had no idea that Walter would be led by it to try what almost cost him his life.

What I want you to think about is not Walter's danger, but Edward's spirit. Better to be drowned, as Walter might have been, than to have a mean heart like Edward's. He wanted to be reckoned the first swimmer in the school, and because he could not be that, for Walter was, he had shamefully hated Walter; and now, to get thought the best by some means, he had told a disgraceful falsehood. The fact is, he cared neither for truth nor for fair play, nor for his conscience, nor for God; he cared for nothing but how he stood with his school-fellows. Now that was worldliness. When a boy's aim has sunk so low, he has become a worldly boy. The chief end of a boy's life ought to be to do right, to speak what is true, to be fair and kind, and to stand well with God: and that is unworldliness.

And worldliness is always more or less disgraceful. It was no disgrace to Edward to be beaten, but it was unacceptably disgraceful to hate and to tell falsehoods; and Edward forgot this, forgot it because he forgot God and goodness. The world was all he thought about—his schoolboy world—and he only wanted its favour; nothing very wrong, as it appears, and yet of all the wrongs that men and boys commit the very chief. Boys, boys, boys: come what would, he must stand well with boys; to have their pat upon his back, their "Well done!" in his ears, and that was all; and for that he disgraced and degraded himself.

Then see what worldliness did for him! First, it made him unjust to God. Boys and their praises are all very well in their place, but wrong, ruinously wrong, when they are put in the place of God, and made the rulers of the actions of life. In Edward's heart they took the place of God, and neither boy nor man was made for that. To be unworldly, we may love the favour of man, but God's favour must be loved above all.

Yes, it is just and generous minds, my children, that the Bible calls unworldly, and which make bright and lastingly happy lives.

Sabbath School Work.

LESSON HELPS.

THE FAITHFUL RECHABITES.

LESSON III., Jan. 17, Jer. xxxv., 12-19. M.C. 30120 verses 18, 19.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"For unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment."—Jer. xxxv., 14.

Time.—B. C. 604-5, fourth year of Jehoiakim.
Place.—Jerusalem, in one of the courts of the temple.

Rulers.—Jehoiakim, King of Judah, B. C. 607-598. Nebuchadnezzar, son of Emperor of Babylon, now commander of the Chaldean army in Judah, becomes emperor, B. C. 604.

Circumstances.—A few years pass away since the warnings in our last lesson. The end is drawing near. Nebuchadnezzar's army is devastating Judah and approaching Jerusalem; but the people have grown worse and worse. And now Jeremiah makes one more effort to persuade them to a better life.

The Rechabites.—(1) A branch of the Kenites, who were a part of the Midianites descended from Abraham and Keturah, who lived once in Southern Arabia. Moses married one of them. Then a portion moved into Canaan, and part settled in Southern Judah (Judg. i., 16; 1 Chron. ii., 55), and a part in Northern Israel about the sea of Galilee (Judg. iv., 11). (2) Their name was derived from Rechab, an unknown ancestor. (3) Jehonadab (or Jonadab) was their great reformer in the time of Jehu, B. C. 884. (2 Kings x., 15-27.) (4) Their creed was (a) to drink no wine or strong drink; (b) to live in tents, and not in houses; (c) to cultivate no land; (d) they believed in the true God.

Jeremiah's Object-Lesson.—See Jer. xxxv., 1-11. The Rechabites came into Jerusalem because Nebuchadnezzar with his fierce soldiers was destroying the country. Here they still lived in tents. Jeremiah takes them into a frequented court of the temple, and placing wine before them, asks them to drink. They refuse because Jonadab 275 years before had so commanded. So, says Jeremiah, you should obey God your Father.

Their Reward.—(1) Rechabites continue to exist to the present day. (2) Some joined the tribe of Levi, and continued to serve in their temple. (3) Every true temperance person is a spiritual descendant; such have always existed.

Subjects for Home Study and Special Reports.—The people growing worse.—The devastations of Nebuchadnezzar's army.—The Rechabites, their history.—Their belief and practice.—How Jeremiah tested them.—The lessons of Israelites should learn from them.—The lessons of obedience we should learn.—The lesson of temperance.

Learn by heart.—Eph. vi., 1-3; Prov. iii., 1-4; Prov. xxiii., 31, 32.

QUESTIONS.

Introductory.—How long a time between this lesson and the last? What evil had Jeremiah foretold in that lesson as the punishment of the people's sins? Had his warnings begun to be fulfilled? Who was devastating the country at this time? Jeremiah xxxv., 11.) Who was King of Israel?

SUBJECT: OBEDIENCE AND TEMPERANCE.

1. The Rechabites.—Give some account of the history of the Rechabites? Where did the Rechabites live? What were their peculiar beliefs and practices? (Jer. xxxv., 6-10.)

2. Jeremiah's Object-Lesson of Obedience (vs. 12-15).—Why did these Rechabites come into Jerusalem to live for a time? (Jer. xxxv., 11.) Where did Jeremiah take them? (Jer. xxxv., 3, 4.) What did he offer them? (Jer. xxxv., 5.) Did they yield to the temptation? (Jer. xxxv., 6.) What reason did they give? Was all this done publicly? What did Jeremiah teach the people by this?

Was it right for Jeremiah to offer them wine? Had they much more reason for obeying God than the Rechabites had for obeying Jonadab? What reasons can you give why the people were under obligation to obey God? Had God done all that was possible to make them good? (Ez. v., 4.) Has He done all He can to make us good?

What had God done to persuade them to obey? (vs. 14, 15.) Meaning of "rising up early" here?

3. Rewards and Punishments (vs. 16-19).—How were the Israelites punished for their disobedience? What reward did God promise the Rechabites for their obedience? Has it been fulfilled?

4. Application to Obedience.—(1) How does this apply to our obedience to God? What reasons can you give why we should obey God perfectly? (2) Apply it to obedience to parents. (3) To obedience to the laws of our country. In what ways are we tempted to disobey? What is the punishment of disobedience to God? (Matt. xxv., 46; Ezek. xviii., 20.) To parents? (Prov. xxi., 17.) To country? What is the reward of obedience to God? (Prov. iii., 1-4; 1 Tim. iv., 8.) To parents? (Ex. xx., 12; Prov. i., 8, 9; vi., 23-22.) To country?

5. Application to Temperance.—Why did the Rechabites drink no wine or strong drink? What temptations have we to use strong drink? What reason for total abstinence do you find in the Bible?

What reasons for total abstinence do you find in science? in reason? in experience and observation of its effects? in the crime strong drink produces? the miseries? the expense? the injury to others? the danger to ourselves?

LESSONS FROM THE RECHABITES.

1. Obedience: (1) The duty of obedience; (2) the tests of obedience in daily life; (3) the reason for obedience to God's command; what God has done for us, His messengers, His providence, the rewards of obedience, and the punishment of disobedience. Obedience: (1) To God; (2) to parents; (3) to laws of our country; (4) of country to laws of God.

2. Temperance: (1) An example of temperance; (2) resisting temptations; (3) the reasons for temperance; (4) the rewards of temperance. Reasons for Temperance: Required by obedience (1) to God's word; (2) to the law of love; (3) to science; (4) to reason; (5) to experience.

REVIEW EXERCISE.

(For the whole School in Concert.)

11. What peculiar people lived among the Israelites? Ans. The Rechabites. 12. What did Jeremiah do with some of them? Ans. He offered them wine to drink. 13. Why did they refuse? Ans. Because their founder commanded them not to drink wine or strong drink. 14. What did Jeremiah teach by this? Ans. That the Israelites should obey God. 15. What lessons may we learn? Ans. Obedience to God and man, and total abstinence from all that can intoxicate.—Peloubet.