

Our Story.

BARBARA STREET.

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

THE day before the lodger was expected a grand tournament with brooms and dusters was held in No. 47. House-cleaning, cooking, and even washing and ironing, were not mysterious processes, known chiefly by their results, to these young ladies. Grace was housekeeper-general, Hester always ready to assist, with resignation if not with alacrity, and Kitty hailed with joy a summons of the kind, since it meant a reprieve from lessons. Mrs. Norris had long since been constituted queen-bee by the imperious will of her small eldest daughter, whose theory was that her mother had worked too much for so long, that she now needed perennial idleness in order to get over it. Whether Mrs. Norris would not have been happier had she been allowed occasionally to beat herself was a problem which never entered the head of either mother or daughter.

This morning all the girls were at work—Hester with more resignation and less alacrity than usual, as was only natural, since she was called upon to advance an end which she intensely objected to. Kitty was in great glee. The mere fact of something happening to bring life into the house was enough to produce that effect. The poor child did not meet with too many excitements to break the monotony of life. And this was an excitement altogether out of the common, and likely to keep up a permanent breeze in the home atmosphere, which was only at present kept from settling into stagnation by Grace's lively ways. Sarah, too, who was, when left to herself, a woman of a sorrowful spirit, had caught the enthusiasm of the hour. She had known her mistresses long enough to be aware that she would not be "put upon" under the new circumstances. If she had more work in one direction it would be taken off in another, and there was the cheering prospect of fees. Human motives, we are assured, are never unmixed, and therefore Sarah can hardly be blamed if such considerations made an undercurrent to her really sincere professions of devotion to Miss Grace's service.

Grace on this occasion caused Sarah and Kitty to explode with laughter so often that she became a serious hindrance to work.

"Really, ma'am," said Sarah, apologetically, to Mrs. Norris, who chanced to be passing, "Miss Grace is carryin' on to that extent, the parson himself couldn't keep a straight face."

"Well, Sarah," replied her mistress, smiling gently, "I hope a straight face is not necessary to getting through the work."

Grace herself, however, was far from bearing a mind at ease. She was uncomfortably conscious that she had done a very daring thing not that she felt at all anxious concerning the responsibility of making the lodger comfortable, though the burden of that would fall entirely on herself. Grace seldom felt herself either mentally or physically unequal to any demand upon her. She was accustomed to draw large drafts upon herself, with the certainty that they would be honoured. No: it was something much more intangible that troubled her. Her own people would have said that Grace was the last person in the world to be visited by vague superstitious or unfounded dread, any more than by sentiment or timidity. But Grace was an arch-hypocrite, and had been from a child, when she would pretend to like being sent up-stairs in the dark, though expecting to find a goblin in every corner, and when one day, a little, thin, pale, quaking child, she had marched by herself into a dentist's surgery, and demanded that two of her teeth should be drawn. Nor, moreover, did any one in those days ever see her cry, though it was not to be supposed that she was exempt from the mighty sorrows of childhood. There were her dolls, for instance, which she tended in a business-like manner, but which she did not profess to love. One day a fatal accident befel the favourite, which rendered her a mangled corpse, and afterwards Grace was discovered to be missing. She was searched for all over the house, and finally her mother, looking in one of the bedrooms for the second time, saw a small tear-stained face emerge from under the valance of the bed, whither she crept to mourn in secret. And now, here was the grown-up Grace showing herself the daughter of that little mother, and a prey to a good deal of nervousness, which it was quite out of her bent to betray. That opinion of men which she had expressed to Kitty a few evenings back was given quite in good faith. They were to her alien creatures, answerable for the greater part of the world's troubles—beings to be feared and avoided—in the lives of most women necessary evils, but well out of her own or her sisters' sphere. Had it occurred to her as likely that they should any of them marry, the idea would have occasioned her alarm and pain. And now, here was she, of her own free will, introducing one of these creatures into their domestic sanctum. It was a very incongruous thing for her to do, to say the least of it; and it was only the image of the two weekly golden sovereigns which forbade her mind from turning regretfully to the "lady"-lodger of her mother's conception. Not that her mind ever alighted on a supposition so unlikely as that the lodger should fall in love with one of the sisters, which would, probably, have occurred to the minds of many girls. On such matters Grace was certainly free from any tinge of sentiment. Her fears, indeed, were associated with few definite ideas, and she would probably have succeeded in stamping them out but for the very defined annoyance of the seak-in jacket. No messenger had come to fetch it away, and Grace knew no messenger would come. It was altogether a very annoying thing—a bad omen, threatening an officious kindness on the part of the lodger, which would be more troublesome than the most unreasonable exactingness. What she should do with the jacket was a question which occupied considerable space in her thoughts. She inclined to a very bold course of action, since it would be advisable, and, indeed, necessary, to put a stopper at once on the lodger's misplaced zeal.

When tea time came, and with it the opportunity of leisurely family chat, Kitty said—

"Now, Gracie, do tell me what you are going to do with the jacket—you might tell me?"

There was a general laugh at Kitty's appealing tone.

"We shall see what we shall see," said Grace

leasingly, with a nod of the head. Kitty looked rather inclined to pout.

"Sometimes I think even you are dreadfully unkind," she said, for it was clearly unjust when the family had come round to her theory of the matter that she should not be treated like a reasonable person.

"Why shouldn't I be unkind sometimes, as well as my betters?" asked Grace with so serious an air of inquiry that Kitty was silenced, feeling that reasoning was not her strong point.

Hester said nothing on the subject, but thought the more.

"Grace in reality treats me as if I were as much of a child as Kitty," she reflected. "Why should she keep me in the dark as to her intentions? It is evident mother knows what she intends to do, or she would look more anxious."

When the tea-tray was removed, Grace said—

"Kitty, come and sit on my knee."

Kitty availed herself with alacrity of this rarely accorded privilege. No dignity, however offended, could resist such an overture as that. She was bigger than Grace, but that was a matter of indifference.

"Where shall we send this pale face to—to get some colour put into when the summer comes with flower and bee?" and Grace pinched Kitty's cheek caressingly.

"It is a long time to wait," said young Kitty, sighing to think how time dragged itself along.

"It will very soon be here, my dear," her mother said, sighing to think of the swift rolling years.

"Don't sigh, either of you," said Grace, laughing.

"Kitty's lessons will make the time fly; and as for mother, if she would sit and look at the clock all day, and measure the time for herself, she would leave off complaining that it was not long enough. But where shall you go to, mother?"

"Don't you think Hastings would be a good place?"

"Very; oh, think of the beautiful yellow sovereigns week by week getting a bigger and bigger heap, each one so many sea-breezes, eh, Kitty? Hester must go because she has not been at all strong lately; and, of course, mamma."

"I shall not go, indeed," said Hester, looking up from her work and colouring.

"Why not?" asked Grace.

"Because I would not take advantage from the price of shame," was Hester's thought; but she only said, "Because I do not need it."

Hester's refusal did not disturb Grace at all, because the strong-willed creature knew that they would all fall in with her views in the end.

"And of course you," said Kitty.

"Oh, dear me, no, not I!"

"Oh, Grace, I couldn't go without you," said Kitty, quite unconscious of the cruel pang she was sending through Hester's breast, who could not but feel it hard that in the affections of the little sister she should be weighted with the terrible incubus of lessons, while the popular Grace had only pleasant relations with her.

"But what would become of the house and Shylock?" asked Grace.

"My dear," said Mrs. Norris, "I think your wit rather runs away with you. I don't see any resemblance to Shylock in Mr. Waterhouse. Whatever may be his character, he certainly seems a frank and gentlemanly young man, and the very reverse of miserly."

"I admit all that, mother; yet because we will buy with him, sell with him, talk with him (about his dinner), but will not eat with him, drink with him, or in other words make friends with him, he is very like Shylock indeed."

"It will certainly be best to keep him at as great a distance as possible," said Mrs. Norris, with mild dignity.

"I should think so, indeed," broke from Hester, with the more emphasis that she felt certain, notwithstanding her mother's quiet tone, that she had been in secret repenting, her rash consent ever since it had been given, but would not compromise the family cheerfulness by allowing this to be seen. Grace turned to Kitty, and said—

"Now I will take the opportunity of giving you a lecture on this subject, and it will do for myself at the same time. Now we know that Madame Mother and my Lady Hetty are persons of such dignity in appearance, manners, and mind, that there is little fear of their compromising themselves in any unholy alliance with this Jew that is coming. But of you—am not so sure, for when had a mustard-seed any dignity? I am afraid of tempting overtures and beguiling words; for the man is evidently of a human, sociable turn, and you are a nice little girl, and the veriest baby for your age," and Grace shook her head, despondingly. "And as for me, I have an unfortunate propensity for getting interested and curious about alien folk, but that I must strive against. The only fear for you will be when you meet him on the stairs. You must bend like Hester, you know, and then run away, so that he has not the opportunity of offering to show you a buffalo's horn or a Hottentot's tooth. If he does, you are lost, because it is not in you to resist."

Kitty had listened to these admonitions seriously, but the two were soon filling the room with merry laughter, for Grace turned her attention to Pan and Lady Betty, the cat, and admonished them each and severally, that for the honour of the family of which they were members they must repel advances with bark and scratch, and that no smell of bones or fish must be sniffed up longingly outside the forbidden door. As to passing through that door, Grace would not insult their dog and cat honour by even mentioning such a thing.

Thus the entire household was enlisted in the defensive league against the invading stranger, with whom the only permissible link was to consist in those two weekly guineas. But in consideration of these, no less than of honour and self-respect, he was to be made entirely comfortable. The cookery Grace had especially at heart. She was a born cook, one of those gifted people whose culinary compositions always turned out right, though she disdained measurement and depended entirely on instinct for her proportions. Sarah was by profession only a "plain cook," and accounted for under-roasted mutton, and hard potatoes by complacently referring to that limitation. So that naturally Grace had a good deal to do in the way of supplementing her labours at all times, but as the family fare was of the simplest description, Grace, as she expressed it, snorted like a war horse before the battle, at the prospect now afforded her of a wider scope for her powers. It had been arranged by letter with Mr. Waterhouse that in order to save him trouble his landlady should provide in general for his table, leaving it of course open to him to make any suggestions when he cared to do so. To provide and cook for some one

who would wish to pay for the proper number of eggs in his puddings, would be ready to have cooked for him sweetbreads, red mullet, salmon, and any conceivable luxury, and would doubtless expect all the fruits of the season to appear on his table, was a positively fascinating experience. Grace declared the effect on her mind was only comparable to having stepped into one of Lord Beaconsfield's novels. Thenceforward "Lothair" was heard of as often as the "The Jew" in the family circle.

On the morning of the day this personage was expected, Kitty was rendered doubly restless over her lessons by the consciousness of excitement in the air, and by her knowledge that Grace was shut into the kitchen with Sarah, engaged in those mysterious and delightful processes which it seemed a proof of the wrong constitution of the world to regard as of less importance than the repetition of "Ich bin, du bist, er ist." Later on in the day the excitement grew to fever-heat. Kitty, released from her duration, ran about everywhere with Grace, putting the finishing touches to the rooms, which it seemed very curious to believe would, after to-day, be their familiar haunts no longer. They seemed to be already taking a kind of don't-know-you air. The little room on that floor which had been Kitty's, perhaps Mr. Waterhouse would use as a spare room—perhaps as a little den, such as the girls had an idea gentlemen liked. Kitty was now removed to a little bed in Hester's room upstairs.

And at last the eventful hour drew near, and everything was ready—the fire burning brightly, the family all discreetly shut up in the dining-room, Sarah, in clean cap and apron, ready to attend, and Mrs. Norris prepared to come out for a moment or so, to express stately welcome. But in the drawing room was laid a kind of a detonating substance, ready to go off in the stranger's face. A large brown-paper parcel lay on the table, directed to "John Waterhouse, Esq."—no other name, or any word of explanation being discoverable thereon.

"If he is innocent," said Grace, "the thing will appear simply a matter for the Sphinx, and he will ring the bell to have it taken to that individual. If he is guilty, we shall hear no more about it."

Waterhouse meanwhile, quite unconscious of such preparations for his reception, made with great complacency his arrangements for settling down in Barbara Street. The day before he was expected there he got through a considerable amount of business with a sort of a vague and flattering idea that henceforth he would be much occupied domestically. He had made an appointment with his lawyer to receive a certain document too important to be delivered into any hands but his own, at six o'clock in the evening. In the multiplicity of his out-of-door engagements, he lost sight altogether of this arrangement, and at the close of the day accepted an invitation to dine with a friend at his club. He returned to his hotel about ten o'clock, and was informed at once that a gentleman was waiting to see him—had been waiting, in fact, since six o'clock. His neglected appointment immediately flashing across his mind, Waterhouse, vituperating himself without stint for his carelessness, which, indeed, was not characteristic of him, hurried to the coffee-room to make what apologies he might. He found the messenger to be a young man with a spare figure, slightly stooping in the shoulders, a dark beardless face, and rather singular blue eyes. He received Waterhouse's apologies with little remark, handing him the papers he had brought, as if to accentuate the fact that they were the point at issue.

"I thank you," said Waterhouse, "I am exceedingly obliged to you, but I regret that you should have waited to see me. There was no necessity for me to get these to-night."

"That was not my affair. I was bound to deliver them to-night."

The young man spoke very dryly, not only showing no answering generosity, but making no acknowledgment of any kind of Waterhouse's penitence. But Waterhouse, being himself very generous, and more occupied with his own fault than his neighbour's non-forgiveness of it, continued in his good-humored tone—

"Well, I am afraid there are not many men with as strict a notion of duty as that; and I must say I wish Mr. Burrows had chosen to send a man with an average conscience, so that mine would not have felt called upon to prick me so severely. However, if you have not been dining, you'll have some supper with me. Here, waiter!"

"Excuse me; you are very good, but I must get home."

"Nonsense, my good fellow; you must really oblige me. If you have waited four mortal hours for my sins, you must stay another half-hour for good-fellowship sake, and to show that you bear no malice."

It was hardly possible to resist Waterhouse's impetuous good-nature, and the young man subsided into his seat again, only half reluctantly. He would not have confessed it to himself, but he was in reality rather won by the frank comradeship of this man, who was a member of that plutocracy which seldom found it worth while to be civil to a lawyer's clerk. Waterhouse ordered supper after the lavish way habitual with him, and chatted easily throughout the entertainment, as was also his way with any man, woman, or child with whom he came in contact. He rather liked his new acquaintance, feeling sorry for him. He seemed a gentleman, evidently superior to his position, which perhaps accounted for his curt abrupt manners, as well as his shabby attire. Waterhouse never made acquaintance with a person of this sort without immediately wondering what he could do for him. But, beyond asking his name, which was not a directly beneficial proceeding, no inquiries of a personal nature seemed fitting. The talk drifted, as it usually does between strangers, on to politics, that being an impersonal topic a degree more fruitful than the weather, and more open to difference of opinion. But it did not seem very provocative of discourse between these two, for it soon transpired that neither was a party man, though for distinctly different reasons, Waterhouse being too much inclined to believe in both sides, and to regard every one's methods and motives as reasonable, while his companion, on the contrary, appeared to think the world in a bad way, and all parties alike concerned in making it worse.

"I fancy you are a disciple of the Chelsea philosopher," said Waterhouse, whose own tastes did not lie in the direction of any philosophy, and especially not of so gloomy a one.

"No," said his companion, with an intonation that gave a half-affirmative meaning to the word, "I belong to no school, except it may be that of the cynics in general, and that is a wide one."

(To be continued.)

Sabbath School Work.

LESSON HELPS.

(Selected from *Pleasant*)

READING THE LAW

LESSON X., March, 7th, Neh. viii., 1-12, memorize verses 8-10.

**GOLDEN TEXT.**—"So they read in the book, in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading"—Neh. viii., 3.

**TIME.**—About the middle of September, B.C. 444. It was the first day of the seventh month, their civil New Year's Day; two months after Nehemiah's arrival at Jerusalem (our last lesson).

**PLACE.**—Jerusalem, in the open square of Ophel, southeast of the temple area.

**RULE.**—See last lesson.

**BUILDING THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM.**—(1) Soon after his arrival, Nehemiah made a careful examination of the ruins. (2) The walls were three or four miles long, and were completed in fifty-two days. (3) Amid two kinds of hindrances, (a) the poverty and sins of God's people, (b) opposition of enemies, by ridicule, false reports, attacks, and attempts to ensnare their leader. (4) The means of success were the mind to work, watchfulness, zeal, prayer, repentance, courage, self-denial, and large gifts.

**HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.**—1. Street: rather, a court or wide open space. Water gate: a gate in the southern wall of the temple area, through which water was brought for use in the temple services. Book of the law: the Pentateuch, or first five books of Moses. 2. Seventh month: of the sacred year, but the first of the civil year. Tisri, September-October. The first day was their New Year's Day. 4. Beside him stood: these were leaders of the people to sustain and honour Ezra in the sight of the people. Perhaps also to relieve Ezra in his long reading, from daylight to noon (v. 3). 5. All the people stood up: as a reverential form of worship. 6. And Ezra blessed the Lord: uttered a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. 8. Read distinctly: so that all could hear every word, either by reading in concert or by repeating the words in different parts of the great congregation. Gave the sense: by explaining or translating the obscure words. The law was read in Hebrew, while the common language was Chaldee. Caused to understand: explained the meaning and applied the truths. 9. Tirshatha: governor.

**SUBJECTS FOR SPECIAL REPORTS.**—Building the wall.—Hindrances and helps.—The great assembly.—Ezra's aids.—How we can help the minister.—Worship, its value and methods.—How to understand it.—The fruits of such study.

**LEARN BY HEART** Deut. xl., 18-20; Psalms xix., 7-11.

QUESTIONS.

**INTRODUCTORY.**—Who was Nehemiah? Where did he live? Why did he come to Jerusalem? What did he do soon after his arrival? (Neh. ii., 13-18.) How long was the wall in building? (Neh. vi., 15.) What were some of the hindrances in the way? What qualities did the people show that enabled them to overcome these obstacles?

**SUBJECT—STUDYING GOD'S WORD.**

**I. THE GREAT MEETING (VS. 1-4).**—Where did the people gather together? At what time? What feast came on this day? (Lev. xxiii., 24, 25.) Of whom did the congregation consist? What book was to be read? Who was the reader? Who aided Ezra?

What was the difference in the work of the 13 mentioned in v. 4, and the 13 in v. 7? In what ways may we aid our minister?

**II. THE OPENING WORSHIP (VS. 5, 6).**—What postures did the people take during the worship? Why? What posture should we take? What is it to bless the Lord? How did the people respond? Should we take part in the worship? What is the use of worship? How will it help us in Bible study?

**III. STUDYING THE WORD (VS. 7, 8).**—What three things did Ezra and his helpers do with the book of the law? How long did the first reading continue? (v. 3.) Why was there need of explaining the Word?

In what ways should we study the Bible? Why should we learn some of it by heart? What helps have we toward understanding the meaning? Why do we need to use any helps?

**IV. FRUITS OF BIBLE STUDY (VS. 9-12).**—What did the reading first lead the people to do? Why did they weep? How does the law of God convince us of sin? What did Nehemiah tell the people to do? Show how joy is a natural result of reading the Bible? What acts of benevolence were they to perform? (v. 10.) With what covenant did they consecrate themselves to God? (Neh. ix., 38; x., 1-39.) What other fruits of reading God's Word? (Neh. viii., 14-18; x., 29-37, xiii., 15-21.) What will be the effect of Bible study upon us?

**SUGGESTIONS ON BIBLE STUDY.**

I. There is great value in large assemblies for Bible study.

II. Therefore, attend teachers' meetings, Sunday school assemblies, normal classes, etc.

III. From the Bible we learn (1) God's will, (2) how to live best in this world, (3) the way to Heaven.

IV. Worship from the heart, and in becoming attitudes, is a great help to Bible study.

V. We should learn many of the words of the Bible by heart.

VI. We should use every means for understanding God's Word.

VII. The fruits of Bible study are repentance, consecration, obedience, joy, brotherly kindness, happy lives, noble character, national prosperity.

**REVIEW EXERCISE.**  
(For the whole School in Concert.)

6. How long were they in building the walls? Ans. Fifty-two days. 7. What did they do when the walls were finished? Ans. They held a great assembly for the study of God's Word. 8. What did they do at this assembly? Ans. Ezra and his aids read and explained the law to the people. 9. What was the effect on the people? Ans. They wept because they had so failed to keep this law. 10. What did Nehemiah tell them to do? Ans. To rejoice in God, and henceforth to obey His law with perfect hearts.