

Our Story.

BARBARA STREET.

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

CHAPTER III.—(Continued).

NO. 47 BARBARA STREET.

"YOU are late, dearest," she said, in the tones whose winning power Hester had found irresistible from the first time she had heard them.

"Yes, George," Hester answered, kneeling beside the couch, and receiving a kiss on each cheek; "but Grace came in late from town, and I could not get away sooner."

"Ah! the little sister queening it, as usual. I can imagine the scene."

"But can you imagine the little sister's generosity, George? She has bought me a dress like her own, out of the savings of her own pin-money."

"That is very good of her; I suppose her allowance is the same as yours?"

"No, it is rather larger."

Miss Denston was silent, but smiled. The smile was apparently significant, as Hester replied to it.

"But she really spends less than I do on herself."

"It is so pleasant to have a surplus one can be generous with," said Miss Denston, with a slight sigh; "but while you have been so pleasantly engaged, dearest, I have been in some pain and in much loneliness without my Hester."

"Have you? I am sorry," said Hester, gazing at her friend with a devotion which for the moment made her face beautiful. "What can I do now I am here?"

"Will you stand behind the sofa and stroke my head for a while?"

Hester obeyed with alacrity. She stood in silence, passing her fingers backward and forward over Miss Denston's worn forehead and thick black hair, in which a streak of grey was mingled here and there.

Miss Denston grew very still under the soothing touch, and at last fell asleep, yet still Hester continued her occupation. The ticking of the timepiece and the occasional sound of falling cinders grew startlingly distinct as minute after minute passed, till nearly half an hour had gone by—half an hour which seemed but as five minutes to Hester, spent in such honourable service. At last Miss Denston awoke.

"Thank you, thank you," she said; "your cool firm touch has drawn all the fire out of my brain. I have been working more than I ought to-day. My thoughts flowed with such extraordinary rapidity, that I was tempted to write on and on. Even now I feel myself compelled to set down—lest it should escape me—the train of thought which has passed through my mind while we were silent."

"You have been to sleep," said Hester, "the latter part of the time."

"Then, the activity of my brain is all the more remarkable," replied Miss Denston, with a touch of sharpness in her voice. "I suppose you know that the brain does not sleep? But, if you will kindly sit down to my writing-table, and take paper and pen, I will dictate to you, and you shall judge for yourself whether that is the case."

Hester sat down, as directed, feeling rather miserable—an effect Miss Denston had in her power at any moment to produce by a slight change of manner. But, as she was preparing the writing materials, Miss Denston spoke again in her former tone, and Hester was comforted.

"Poor Philip is out again; you see, and I do not wonder. It is so dull at home, with no one but his prosy old sister to bear him company."

Miss Denston gave a rather melancholy smile. "Your companionship would be delightful, George, to any one who deserved to have it; but I do not feel properly indignant with your brother, for, you see, his loss is my gain."

"Thank you, dear. It is not a trouble to you to do these services for me?"

Hester looked at her, and smiled radiantly. "Ah! you don't expect me to answer that question," she said; "you know it is the kind of labour that physics pain."

"You rebuke me, dear, for speaking as though I were alone in suffering. But, believe me, I do not really forget that in the midst of friends you, too, know the grief of loneliness, and that my poor Hester has many crosses. How have things gone with you to-day?"

"There is nothing fresh to tell you. I don't want to talk of myself to-night. Shall I not write what you wished?"

"If you please; for the little matter I have on hand has to be with the publishers on Friday. It is a subject on which you and I have had many happy talks, dear."

Miss Denston was silent for a few minutes, during which Hester observed upon the desk a manuscript written out in Miss Denston's own hand, and tied at the corner with ribbon, and docketed. Her eye also fell on a slip of paper containing the words, "Memo.—Three-quarters of an hour for Rev. T. W. Willerton, on Arrian Errors." As to what this could mean Hester wondered, but could arrive at no conclusion, save that the matter must belong to the literary arcanas from which her inexperienced shut her out. She did not seek any explanation from Miss Denston, for that lady was never disposed to be communicative on the subject of her literary labours, and now also she began to dictate very fluently, and Hester proceeded to write, with feelings of high veneration for her friend, and keen satisfaction that she chose thus to use her as an instrument in her work.

"The human mind," began Miss Denston, in clear tones, "is essentially lonely. In its passage from the cradle to the grave it is ever alone, and this eternal fact has been recognized by all true poets and poets since the world began. Three thousand years ago the secret of human nature was thus expressed by the inspired writer, 'The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddeth not with its joy,' and in other words the poet of to-day sings the same song—

"Not e'en the dearest heart, and next our own, Knows half the reason why we smile or sigh."

"What is it, again; but this truth which finds expression in that exquisite lyric entitled 'The Buried Life'! But if such words are true of every human soul which has been ushered into this world of pain, they are true in a special sense of the few. These are the souls born into unfit earthly conditions. I do not include in this fated class the morbid self-inflated souls who, like some stagnating pond, would breathe forth a miasma of misery around them into whatever lot they might be cast;

but those who, nobler or greater, or more sensitive than their fellows, are cast as it were into a pit with the common herd. Unhappy indeed is his lot who has wings to soar, and would do so, e'en to the empyrean, had he the blue ether of sympathetic appreciation as a medium, in place of the clogging, heavy atmosphere of commonplace incredulity. There is many a Hamlet unknown and unsung, many a soul caged, cribbed, confined, who has fainted and fallen in its lowly place for want of that support with its surroundings which is essential to freedom and joy."

Much more followed which Hester tirelessly transcribed. The thoughts appeared to her profound, and couched in beautiful language. Perhaps had she read the composition as a paragraph in the publication for which it was destined, Hester's judgment would have inclined her to ask the meaning and value of all these high-sounding phrases; but this girl could no more criticize her friend than could a young priestess of Diana her virgin goddess. And perhaps had you or I heard these phrases delivered unhesitatingly in Miss Denston's impressive tones, some illusion might have been cast over them for us as well as for poor Hester, who was only eighteen, and very much in love with this, as it seemed to her, talented and noble friend. But she was an intelligent girl, and had not her young hero-worship blinded her, she would have been inclined to suspect the grand sound of these phrases, and see that it dressed up very poor kind of sense and commonplace thought to look like something clever.

Had Miss Denston's writing been doctored of its fine words and phrases, and put into plain common sense English, it would have had no distinction whatever; it was, in fact, sound without sense. The only real thoughts in it were, that we are always to some extent alone, even when with friends or in a crowd, which is a truism as old as the hills; and that some people are more lonely than others because placed in unsuitable surroundings, which is also a very patent fact, though not one which it is advisable to dwell upon, for too many of us are already inclined to fancy ourselves superior to our destiny.

By-and-by, as the timepiece was on the stroke of ten, the street door was heard to open and shut, and steps ascended the stairs.

"Here is Philip," said Miss Denston, "and my brain is almost dazed with this improvisation."

Hester rose, and reached her hat and shawl from the chair on which she had laid them. While she was putting them on, the door opened, and Philip Denston entered. He was younger than his sister. Her peculiar blue eyes and thick black hair were repeated in him, so also was a certain expression of obstinacy about the mouth and chin, but the fascination of her smile and glance was wanting. He gave his sister a silent nod, and to Hester an equally silent bow, to which she made a chilling acknowledgment, which consisted, one might have said, in a movement of the eye-lids. A kiss and a few murmured words passed between the friends. Mr. Denston, after opening the door for Hester, followed her; and as he passed, took his hat down from the peg where it hung.

"Pray, do not trouble," said Hester, coldly. "Excuse me; I cannot let you cross the street alone."

Now this ceremony had been gone through several times before, and Hester greatly objected to it. She wished to receive no company from a man who could behave to such a sister as this man did. But as there was no escape, Hester contented herself with adopting as frigid a demeanour as it was possible to assume. In silence they crossed the road; in silence walked for the door to open, then, raising his hat, Mr. Denston departed with a "Thank you" on Hester's part, and a "Good night" on his. Hester's behaviour was apparently of no moment to him; and if he made any reflection concerning it, it was probably that the girl appeared to have no manners.

Hester, on her way up stairs, looked in at the sitting-room door, intending to say good-night; and then she went to bed. Grace was there alone.

"Is that you, Hester? she cried; "don't you want any supper? Do come in and have a chat. I have sent mother to bed; she looked so tired."

Hester came forward reluctantly. Grace was curled up in the rocking-chair, of which she was so fond that it was considered her special property. But she got up and drew a low chair to the fire for Hester.

"I don't want any supper. I was going to bed," said Hester, seating herself, however. They sat for a time silently. Grace rocked her chair, and and fro and looked into the fire.

"Did you want to say anything," asked Hester. "Oh, no, I don't think so; only I have not seen much of you to-day. What have you been doing over there?"

"I have been writing at Miss Denston's dictation."

"Oh, do you like that? Do you still like her as much as you did?"

"Certainly."

Hester looked pale, and cold; and unresponsive. She was quite aware that Grace was regarding her keenly, and in consequence drew the folds of reserve more close.

"It is very odd, isn't it," said Grace, "that I should not know a person with whom you are so intimate?"

"Why is it odd?" asked Hester, with increased coldness of tone. "Do you think that a younger sister has no right to make friends for herself?"

Grace gave a quick look at her sister.

"There should be no question of rights between us, Hester," she said, and then the girls looked away from each other. If Grace was hurt by Hester's speech, she did not show it, unless by silence. Hester perhaps repented her bitterness of tone, for after a few moments she said, with a great effort to call up feelings of gratification:

"Have you added to my obligations to you, Grace, by devising some way of making up your lovely present? I shall be so afraid of not doing the best with it that I know I shall not dare to put the scissors in."

Grace recognized the spirit of atonement in which Hester had spoken, and responded cordially; and they were soon deep in a dress-making discussion. But when they kissed each other, before separating for the night, there was some constraint on either side; each went to bed with a feeling of discomfort and self-reproach. Grace's feeling was due to her failure in winning her sister's confidence. It was impossible that, with her alertness of mind, she should have missed seeing the signs of bitterness which Hester's looks and tones had of late occasionally betrayed, in spite of her most determined efforts at self-repression, though, indeed, Grace had not the least idea of the extent to which that bitterness had eaten into her sister's mind.

(To be continued.)

Sabbath School Work.

LESSON HELPS.

DANIEL IN BABYLON.

LESSON V., Jan. 31st, Daniel i, 8-21; memorize verses 20, 21.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy word."—Ps. cxix, 9.

TIME.—B.C. 605-3. Eighteen years before the last lesson. The beginning of the 70 years' captivity.

PLACE.—Babylon, on the Euphrates, 500 miles east of Jerusalem.

RULERS.—Jehoiakim, King of Judah; Nebuchadnezzar, of Babylon.

DANIEL.—At this time fourteen years old, born at Jerusalem, of noble parentage, carried captive to Babylon, where he lived all the 70 years' captivity. A great statesman, a learned scientific man, a true prophet of the noblest character, lived at least till B.C. 534, 85 years old.

BOOK OF DANIEL.—Author, Daniel. Divided into two parts, chaps. 1-6 being historical; chaps. 7-12, prophetic. It is written in two languages, Hebrew (chaps. i, ii; iv; viii-xii), and Chaldee (chaps. iii, iv; chap. vii).

CIRCUMSTANCES.—We now turn back a little way in the history, to the beginning of the 70 years' captivity, and take up the study of Daniel, who here finds his place in the history.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.—The Four Captives. About the time of Lesson 2, a number of captives were carried from Jerusalem to Babylon. Among them were four boys who became noted in history—Daniel and the three who were cast into the fiery furnace. These four were selected to be trained for the official service of King Nebuchadnezzar. They were taught in the Chaldean learning, and fed with the luxuries provided by the king. 8. Purposed not to defile himself with the king's meat, i. e., food. Some of the flesh was that forbidden to Jews. See Lev., chap. xi; Deut. xii, 23-25. Often it was consecrated to idols. It was too luxurious for their best health. 9. God brought Daniel into favour: by direct influence, and by giving Daniel a lovable, noble character. To endanger my head: lest his head be cut off for disobedience. 11. Meltar: the meltar, or steward; not a proper name. He had charge of their food. This plan was doubtless by permission of the prince of the eunuchs. Hananiah, etc.; see their other names in v. 5. 12. Pulse: vegetable food, grains. Pulse originally meant leguminous seeds, as beans, peas. 18. End of the days: of the three years' training (v. 3). 19. Stood before the king: as his officers and advisers. Servants always stood when in the presence of the monarch. 20. Better than all the magicians: the priestly, learned class. Astrologers: wise men, magi, scientific men. All used and believed in magic and astrology. The Chaldeans were at this time the most learned people in the world. 21. First year of Cyrus: B.C. 534, the end of the 70 years' captivity. Cyrus conquered Babylon.

SUBJECTS FOR SPECIAL REPORTS.—The book of Daniel.—The life of Daniel.—The character of Daniel.—How he was tempted.—How he overcame.—The way he reached success.—Principles of temperance.

LEARN BY HEART.—Heb. iv, 15, 16; James i, 5; Prov. iii, 13-17.

QUESTIONS.—INTRODUCTORY.—What book of the Bible do we now study? Why do we change to this? Give the date and place of this lesson? The events of what other lesson occurred about the same time? What great captivity began at this time?

SUBJECT: VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION.

I. THE FOUR CAPTIVES.—Who at this time conquered Judah and Jerusalem? (v. 1.) What four boys were among the captives? (v. 6.) Who was the chief? What do you know of the others? (Dan. iii, 1-26.) Give some account of Daniel's life. His appearance and talent (v. 4). How old was he at this time? For what were these four selected? (vs. 3-5)

II. THEIR TEMPTATION (v. 8).—What purpose did Daniel have in his heart? What was the king's meat? Why did he not wish to eat it? How would it defile him? Why would he refuse the wine? What temptations would he have to eat as the other boys did? What temptation from his youth? His love of pleasure? His desire of success? The customs around him? His absence from home restraints?

III. THEIR VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION (vs. 8-14).—What was the first thing Daniel did to overcome the temptation? (v. 8 f.c.) What did he do next? (v. 8 l.c.) How did God help him? (v. 9) How would Daniel's previous character help him? How his early training? What did he ask of the prince over him? What objection was made? What test did Daniel propose? What help have we in overcoming temptation? (James i, 1-3; Heb. iv, 15; Matt. vi, 13; xxvi, 41; 1 Cor. x, 13)

IV. THE FRUITS OF VICTORY (vs. 15-21).—What was the effect of Daniel's course on his health? (v. 15) Was this natural, or a miracle from God? What would be the effect on his character? What did God give him? (v. 17.) Does this imply that he was diligent and faithful in study? How long did the training continue? (vs. 15, 5) What position was given these four men? (v. 19) What is said of their wisdom and learning? What were the elements of Daniel's success? What traits worthy of imitation do you find in his character?

LESSONS FROM THE BOYHOOD OF DANIEL.

I. VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION.—(1) He had the same temptations as we; (2) he overcame, therefore we can; (3) God opens the way of escape; (4) religious principle, trust in God, courtesy, firmness, looking to Jesus, prayer, watching, will help us to escape.

II. TEMPERANCE.—(1) Temperance is total abstinence from all that defiles, and right use of all appetites and desires; (2) strong drink, tobacco, etc., defiles our bodies, which are the temples of God; (3) we should care for our health; (4) the effect of temperance has been tested; (5) religion is the basis of temperance.

III. SUCCESS IN LIFE.—(1) By God's favour, (2) by temperance; (3) by care for health; (4) by overcoming temptations; (5) by religious principle; (6) by faithful study; (7) by faithfulness to those over us; (8) by true and noble character; (9) by amiability and courtesy.

THE FIERY FURNACE.

LESSON VI., Feb. 7th, Dan. iii, 16-23; memorize verses 16-23.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace."—Dan. iii, 17.

TIME.—Eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, B.C. 587. About 16 years after the last lesson; and near the time of the fall of Jerusalem (Les. 4).

PLACE.—The plain of Dura, about five miles southeast of Babylon.

RULERS.—Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon (605-561). Zedekiah, the last King of Judah. Pharaoh Hophra, King of Egypt. The "seven wise men" in Greece.

PROPHETS.—Jeremiah, at Jerusalem. Ezekiel, by the river Chebar in Babylonia. Daniel, at Babylon.

INTERVENING HISTORY.—Soon after Daniel and his friends had become officers in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, Daniel had an opportunity to show his wisdom by revealing and interpreting a dream for the king. Then Daniel was made chief ruler, and his three friends were exalted to high office at his request.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.—1. The golden image was erected on the plain of Dura, five miles from Babylon. It was sixty cubits (90 feet) high, and six cubits (nine feet) broad. This includes the pedestal. It was probably of wood or clay, and covered with plates of gold. Diodorus tells us of three golden images in the temple of Bel at Babylon, worth, with their altars of gold, \$86,000,000. 2. The inauguration. The officers and chief men from all parts of the empire were summoned to Babylon, and compelled to bow down and worship before the golden image, on pain of being cast into the fiery furnace. When the music sounded, all bowed before the image except the three men who were with Daniel in our last lesson. 16. Shadrach, etc.: see last lesson. Said to the king: when they were summoned to him for not worshipping the image. 17. If it be so: If God sees this to be best. 19. Full of fury: (1) Because their conduct was in direct disobedience to his command. (2) It interfered with his plans of unifying the empire. (3) It was against his religion. (4) It seemed a bad example to his subjects. 20. Fiery furnace: such as was used for smelting metals; a hole in the top into which the men were cast, and an opening in the side, through which they were seen, and came forth. 21. Bound: with iron chains (Jer. xl, 4). Coats: a long robe. Hosen: inner tunic. Hats: rather cloaks. These are mentioned because they were combustible, and yet were not burned. 24. Astonied: astonished. 25. The Son of God: a son of God, a divine being, an angel (v. 28).

SUBJECTS FOR SPECIAL REPORTS.—The intervening history.—The three men.—The golden image.—The inauguration assembly.—The object of Nebuchadnezzar.—The fiery furnace.—Religious principle.—The modern golden image and fiery furnace. How God still delivers His people.—The effect on ourselves and others of standing by our principles.

LEARN BY HEART.—vs. 17, 18; 1 Pet. i, 7; Rev. ii, 7.

QUESTIONS.—INTRODUCTORY.—What opening toward usefulness and renown came to Daniel soon after the last lesson? What occasion did he and his friends hold after that? How many years between those events and the lesson for to-day? What prophets lived at this time? Who was King of Judah? What great event took place there, not far from this time?

SUBJECT: SERVING GOD AT ANY COST.

I. THE GOLDEN IMAGE.—What plan did Nebuchadnezzar form to consolidate his new empire? Describe the golden image. Where was it placed? Who were summoned to worship it? What punishment was threatened to those who should refuse?

What were the probable objects of this great gathering? Why is so much said of the music? Why was there so severe a penalty for refusing to worship?

II.—THE MEN OF TRUE RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE (vs. 16-18).—What three men refused to worship the image? What other proof of religious principle had they shown before? What office did they now hold? (Dan. ii, 49.) Give an account of their summons before the king. What was their reply to his demand? Did they know that God would rescue them? If they had known, would it have required great courage and piety to do what they did?

What excuses might they have made for complying? What is meant by "a relaxation of principle"? The difference between steadfastness to principle, and obstinacy? Is there any other true religion than a religion of principle? Before what golden idols does the world now command the Christian to bow down? Under what penalty?

III. WHAT MEN DID TO THEM (vs. 19-23).—How did the king feel about their refusal? Why? What did he do to the men? What kind of a furnace was this? Why was it heated so hot? What showed the greatness of the heat? Why are their garments mentioned?

IV. WHAT GOD DID FOR THEM (vs. 24-28).—What three wonders did the king see while looking at the fiery furnace? What was the fourth person like? Who was it? Why made thus visible? What did the king then do? What shows how unharmed they were? What was the effect of all this on the king? Did these three men know that God would release them? Would or should this have made any difference as to their conduct? (vs. 17, 18.)

Into what fiery furnaces are we sometimes cast? Does God always deliver us from them? In what other way does he sometimes save us? (Rom. viii, 28; 2 Cor. xii, 7-10.) What is the effect of firm endurance of trials upon ourselves? upon others?

LESSONS FROM THE MEN IN THE FIRE.

I. By faithfulness in early life these men were prepared for greater trials and greater victories.

II. The trial of our faith strengthens our character.

III. The trial of our faith manifests God's power and love to others.

IV. The world expects us to bow before the golden images of wealth, success, pleasure, lax religion, and easy morals.

V. Its fiery furnace is persecution, unpopularity, ridicule, social ostracism.

VI. True religious principle will do right regardless of consequences.

VII. God saves His children either from trouble or in trouble. He delivers them out of it, or makes it minister to their good and the good of their cause.—Peloubet.