

Our Story.

BARBARA STREET.

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

CHAPTER XXXIII. (Continued.)

"THERE is no one to regret my absence," he said, with a half smile. "Yes, we all should—I should." Hester's tone carried conviction. He smiled more fully, more brightly. "I am selfish enough to think that a good hearing. If there was one person to regret me I would go, which sounds contradictory, doesn't it?" "When you come back you will find us all ready with a welcome."

"That is a cheerful way of putting the matter, but who knows whether I should come back at all?" "God knows," replied Hester, with the same grave and earnest look; "we and you are in His hands."

These two seemed to be quite carried out of themselves and their habitudes. Denston found himself talking more freely of himself than he had ever done to any one before. Hester found herself carried along to reply by an unwonted impulsion which gave her words without consideration.

"But," she continued, "the voyage, the climate, the out-of-door life will make you strong—you will be stronger than you have ever been before. And then hope will come back to you. There is my prophecy," Hester smiled.

"Health, yes, health would be worth something," said Denston musingly, as if to himself. "But you do not only go to seek health," said Hester, scarcely trembling even as she spoke the decisive words; "she hardly felt she was daring, she felt not at all the fear of going wrong. 'You go to seek forgetfulness'."

Denston started, glanced at her, and then turned away his eyes again. "That is not an inspiring errand," he said at last.

"But it must be done," Hester spoke with the tender unflinching severity of an operating surgeon. There was a long pause; then Denston looked at her again with eyes that seemed to say, "You then know all about it."

He asked suddenly the straightforward question—"Does your sister love any other man?" "Oh, no," replied Hester, startled. "But—" She was interrupted.

"You need not continue," he said, and advanced a pace or two. He took a letter from his breast pocket, and laid it on the table. "Give her this, please," he said. "Say that I expect no answer."

All his old dryness of manner had returned. But Hester felt no reaction or chill of disappointment. Secure in her own interpretations, she was beyond the reach of any such surface variations.

"There is one thing I ought to tell you," she said, quietly, "and that is that my sister is ready, if you wish it, to make good anything her manner or words may have promised."

"Do you mean to tell me that that was her message to me?" Denston's tone was very stern, and Hester saw that his face was pale and set, and that in his eyes was evident the pain otherwise suppressed.

"It was indeed. Remember how eager she is to undo—how loth to add to the injuries of the past." "I marvel that you accepted that commission."

Hester looked straight into Denston's eyes. "I knew," she said, "that such an offer could have no temptations for you."

She made no further attempt to explain the nature of Grace's feelings; that operating-knife which she had nerved herself to use she felt was unneeded. Denston's eyes were held by Hester's during a moment's silence. Then he said—

"I can't let you say that. I have had moments of temptation. You do not know how base a man may be. I have been sinking—very low lately. I ought to have written that letter last night; but I took an insane pleasure in delaying it. It gave me a horrible satisfaction to believe myself capable of refraining from it."

Denston paused, and then continued in a different tone— "But I did not expect to make confession of these secret abominations of my soul. Forgive me. I will go."

He advanced to take leave. "Is it settled, then, that I stay with your sister?" said Hester, in a tone full of gentleness, and holding out her hand.

"Settled? No, nothing is settled. It would not be a life fit for you. What a satire that would be, were I to condemn you to it."

"It will be no condemnation—I will not be a slave," Hester replied, smiling. "I have nothing to do—it would be giving me occupation. I should take pupils, and support myself, and that I have always wished. You do not know what a disappointment it would be if you deny me."

Denston also smiled one of his occasional smiles, full of feeling, and shook his head as he did so. "We will, perhaps, talk of it again," he said, and then took leave. A moment or so after he had done so, Mrs. Norris returned from her walk. Hester waited in the parlor until she heard her mother go upstairs, and then she went up to Grace, who was again lying down, with the letter. But she found her mother there before her. Grace had risen from the bed, a tinge of colour had come into her cheeks, and her eyes were sparkling. It appeared that Mr. Waterhouse had just suggested to Mrs. Norris that the family should all go off to the seaside as soon as possible after the funeral, which was to take place the next day, he betaking himself to the Langham Hotel.

"Oh," exclaimed Grace, brokenly, "can we go, mother? Have we the money? It would be too good. To get away from everything, to breathe freely again! I am in a prison here. It is so hot, and we have suffered so much."

"Yes, my dear, we will go," replied her mother, in tones which contrasted forcibly with Grace's eagerness. Grace was recalled to herself. "Oh, I am selfish!" she cried; "you, my poor mother, cannot get away from your trouble. Do you wish it? We will not go unless you wish it."

"Yes, I do wish it. It will do us all good. You are very feverish, Grace; you have been working too hard. Mr. Waterhouse suggested the plan as soon as I told him you were so unwell; he said he had been intending not to speak until after tomorrow. Hester and Kitty, too, are very pale. I am anxious about you all."

to take the last look, to give the last kiss to the husband who had been given back to her only to be recalled so soon. But youth cannot live by the bread alone of their elders, nor drink of the same cup, however close may be the bond of love between them. After a few moments' silence, Hester handed Grace the letter without speaking. Grace gave her a glance of extreme surprise.

"He wrote this before you saw him?" "Yes, he brought it with him." "What is it?" "Read it."

"I am afraid to." "You need not be." Grace broke open the envelope, and leaning towards Hester made her read at the same time.

"DEAR MISS NORRIS,—I fear you have expected to hear from me before this. Up till last evening, however, I was in doubt, and much bewilderment of mind. Your manner last night left me no doubt. Some misapprehension, for which I know not how to account, has caused me much perturbation, and I fear in some degree you also. If that was due to some stupidity or selfish blunder on my part, I pray you to forgive me, and in any case to rest satisfied that the misunderstanding is at an end.—I am, yours truly, PHILIP DENSTON."

"Why, then, did he not write to me last night?" asked Grace, when this note had been read twice over. "Hester did not unfold what she knew of the reason."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MARTENHOE.

MARTENHOE is not a fashionable watering-place. It is an ancient straggling little town, running along under the slope of a hill. On the hill-side is perched a fine old church, far too considerable a structure for the necessities of the place.

Between Martenhoe and the sea lies half a mile of flat meadow, through which an elm avenue makes a shaded path. And down by the sea are to be found a terrace of lodging-houses and a few less important ones scattered up and down. Here also is a promenade of small pretensions, and a half-dozen of bathing-machines. Seaward comes up, for the very sea at Martenhoe is a modest one, a crisp rippling tide. Turning landwards is to be seen a stretch of green meadow, then the low red roofs of the little town, then the tree-dotted hillslopes and the grey church tower. London sends down its shoals to Chelpestone, some miles up the coast, where is a hive of streets, a noisy promenade, a noisier beach, and a surrounding country flat and arid. But it knows nothing of Martenhoe; it has spared the rich meadows, knee-deep this June weather in the lush crops growing ripe for harvest, with their moon-daisies, red sorrel, and brown feathery grasses swaying in the fresh breeze that blows from the sea; it treads not the winding lanes, whose high green banks on either side are aflame with gorse and broom. It disturbs not the noisy stillness of the copses, where the small wild creatures murmur and rustle or sit. And for such forbearance the few people who know and love this out-of-the-world corner of England's garden are abundantly grateful.

It may be supposed that an arrival of visitors here is an event to be noted, especially if they are a novelty, and not to be recognized as among the ordinary frequenters to the place. One fine June afternoon four feminine figures alighted on the platform of the little railway station which is set on the hill-side in a golden frame of gorse, and leaving their luggage to be carried by the omnibus, walked down into the town, on their way to seek lodgings. The shopkeepers and landladies who saw them pass gauged them at once as poor and genteel—a kind which is highly unprofitable. They also proved to be difficult to please, for they scoured the town, high and low, before they settled themselves down. Finally, they took Mrs. Inchbar's rooms, which are some way from the sea, and are small and cheap. But the cottage is perched on a grassy knoll, and over the town and the fields the sea-breezes blow straight upon it. Its porch is covered with climbing roses, and the serpentine box-edged walks of its little garden, fit only for the promenades of a doll, enclosed lorge-shaped beds full of pansies, pinks, and musk. The townsfolk, when they discovered the cause, found their suspicions of the new visitors' economical tendencies confirmed. But the visitors had a standard of which the townsfolk were ignorant. They measured merit by unlikeness to Barbara Street, and by that test Church Cottage bore off the palm.

Martenhoe speculated concerning them, was interested in them. The four ladies passed through the town in a morning, bought in their provisions, and then went down the avenue to the sands. The mother was a new-made widow, poor thing, that was plain, and left with little enough to spend over her mourning. The young lady that generally walked with her, the tall one, was what some might call handsome, but as proud as if she had got anything to be proud of, which she clearly had not. But the widow and the haughty young lady rarely spoke to any one out of the family. It was the other pair that came into the shops, and did all the little business here and there. The small sister, voted not at all pretty, with eyes too big for her, and a sallow complexion, became, however, a general favourite. And in face of plain attire and an insignificant physique, it was surprising how much attention was awarded to her; for no temperament is so coarse or intelligence so dense as not to be affected by the mysterious influence of will, an influence which may be irresistible without being at all understood. Modest as were her purchases, the tradespeople served her with smiles and readiness, and the grim bathing woman reserved a machine for her in a grossly partial way that brought upon her a good many half-wondering, half-disdainful glances from sundry well-dressed rivals. At the heels of this sister always came an open-eyed, childish girl, well-meaning enough, but at the awkward age when girls will always seem in the way. This pair of sisters always seemed gay, and to be enjoying themselves thoroughly, which was more enviable in a sorrowful world, and more of a credit to the place, than the quiet sadness of the mother or the cold self-possession of the other sister.

In the meantime each of these criticised individuals, with the exception of Kitty, who was still in that happy period of existence when experience acts upon one from without and not from within, was living that inward life which receives little check or stimulus from change of place and outward circumstances, and which removes the mind from the power of any criticism, great or small.

Every one will remember the epoch in his own experience when the discovery came upon him that to procure the means of enjoyment was not

the only essential to enjoying one's self; and that though the cup of happiness might be compounded exactly to taste of all the ingredients experience or imagination could suggest, he might after quaffing it find himself bearing an amazed and heavy heart.

When Hester came in sight of the green dancing ocean, flecked with white, for the first time in her life, she was moved, it is true, but the moment of emotion gone, green sea, nor golden gorse, nor blithe sweet-smelling breezes buoyed her spirit high above trouble. The actual Barbara Street was left far behind, but what had been suffered, and felt, and done there was more real still than Martenhoe and its June glories.

This was Hester's experience, hers being a nature which emotion graced deeply with lines not easily erased. But Martenhoe, though it could not bring gaiety to Hester's spirit, was full of good for it. It was good for her to be removed from the sphere of agitation. Inensibly her spirit gained repose and acquiescence in the healthy out-of-door life she led here. Her trust in her mother and sister grew too in the inevitably close companionship of sea-side life. She herself was aware that the respite was what she needed. She recognized that her absence from Barbara Street, which stood for Philip Denston, was, if something of a wrenching, something also of a relief; she felt herself growing capable of regarding the contingency of his leaving England without farewell as holding a possible advantage for him and for them all. She appreciated the breathing space, the opportunity for calming and settling her mind before entering on the new life which lay before her if her offer were accepted.

After the first week she began to find her emotions dominating her less, and instead of an utter languor of body, an inclination sprang up to join Grace and Kitty in their walks. She awoke occasionally also to a sense that she was enjoying herself, and had forgotten trouble; for she was young, after all, and there was nothing here to press the thorns into her, and there was always the comfort that sprang from the new sense of confidence in family relationships. If her mother seemed heedless of her presence, passive and preoccupied, Hester was now aware of the cause. The irritating mysteries of the past were made clear. Though Grace was now gay and wilful as ever, and administered her caresses in the old light, bright way, and the deeps broken up for a time were now frozen again, and intercourse was once more on the surface, things could never again be as of old between them. When Grace patted her cheek or mocked her laughingly, Hester did not suppose her heartless. When she fished for crabs at the end of the breakwater with a liveliness of interest worthy of a better sport, Hester did not stigmatize her as childish. She still wondered, but now she trusted, which transformed the wonder into something harmless. Had Grace really any interior life of emotion and thought, as overflowing with energy and fun, she buoyed up the quiet feminine party, and kept the temperature from sinking below proper (été-day spirit-level)? It certainly seemed that, taking leave of Barbara Street, she had at the same moment taken leave of all seriousness and soberness of mind, and that the suffering and anxiety of the last weeks there had vanished without leaving any more trace than a bad dream. Indeed, from the hour when the expedition was decided upon, Grace had risen like a reed that may be bent by a storm, but rises elastic after it. There was no more feverishness or depression; it seemed that the sea-air even in prospect exhilarated her like wine; the weight of misery had already been to some extent lifted—now escape, the country, the sea lay before her.

The first days of mourning over, all was cheerful preparation and expectancy. Philip Denston was not seen; he came no more. For him she felt the prospect had begun to brighten, as there seemed every reason to suppose he would accept Mr. Waterhouse's offer. It was hardly possible for Grace to regard as very acute the suffering that might arise out of a hopeless love for herself; so that concerning Philip she grew a little comforted. Hester, it was true, still suffered, and her mother's pale face and widow's cap were a constant reminder that a new grief had come into her lot.

Grace was always more apt to suffer through the troubles of the people she loved than on her own account, but it was not her bent to betray the suffering in a lengthened face and dejected demeanour; nor was her sympathy shown in tearful kisses, but rather in the shedding of added sunshine about her. What influence her presence had at such times cheered and animated, and her rare kisses were given with smiles.

But now and then, if one observed her closely, one might surprise a future glance, anxious or gravely inquiring, which contradicted any estimate of thoughtlessness that might have been formed. On the whole the anxious glances Grace gave just then were reassuring; they told her that Hester was going through her trouble in a way to admire, even to reverence, and that her mother's grief was of a kind less poignant and bitter than the anguish which had tortured her in secret through so many years. If, in addition to the interests and cares which centred thus in those dear to her, Grace had brought away with her any more personal, she herself would have been the last person to admit it, and no one observing her would have guessed it. It was possible, nevertheless. Certainly the experiences of the last few weeks seemed to have left her more vulnerable at a certain point. The very relief which she had felt on escaping from one entanglement seemed to prepare the way for another. Joy or something else threw her off her guard.

(To be continued.)

"LAND O' THE LEAL"

THERE are expressions in Scotch songs as suggestive as a sermon. Lady Nairn's "Land o' the Leal" is not only a picture of the land of the living that lies beyond the land of the dying, but a source of consolation to those who have been parted from friends who have gone before.

"Leal" is the Scotch for loyal, and the song lifts up the tearful eye to the land of the loyal, where "There's nae sorrow there, John, There's naither cauld nor care, John, The day is aye fair In the land o' the leal."

When the late Dr. Dickson, a godly clergyman of Edinburgh, lost a sweet little girl, he sang "The Land o' the Leal" at family worship. So real was it to him that he said, "It's a pity but what that was among the paraphrases! Since I've thought more of 'our bonnie bairn's being there,' I must say that I cannot sing so heartily

"And oh! we grudge her sair To the land o' the leal."

"for she is safe and happy in the land o' nae sorrow, in the land of the true-hearted."

Sabbath School Work.

LESSON HELPS.

FOURTH QUARTER.

JESUS DELIVERED TO BE CRUCIFIED.

LESSON III., October 17th, John XIX., 1-16; Matthew 26:30; Mark XV., 15-19.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified.—John XIX., 16.

TIME.—Six to eight o'clock, Friday morning, April 7, A. D. 30.

PLACE.—Pilate's palace in Jerusalem.

PARALLEL HISTORY.—With vs. 1-3, Matt. XXVII., 26-30; Mark XV., 15-19.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES. Order of Events. (1) Pilate warned by his wife's dream (Matt. XXVII., 19): Pilate's palace early Friday morning, while the people were deciding to choose Barabbas.

(2) The end of Judas (Matt. XXVII., 3-10; Acts I., 18-19): As soon as Judas saw that Jesus was really condemned to death, and made no resistance, he was struck with remorse, and committed suicide.

(3) Pilate orders Jesus to be scourged (v. 1, Matt. XXVII., 26; Mark XV., 15): Court of Pilate's palace, six to seven o'clock a.m. (4) Mockery by the soldiers (vs. 2, 3; Matt. XXVII., 27-30; Mark XV., 16-19). 2. A purple robe: one of the soldier's red cloaks. Matthew says that they put a reed in his hands, and Mark that they spat upon him. (5) Pilate makes another effort to release Jesus (vs. 4-7). Outside the palace. His object was to appeal to the pity of the multitude. 7. We have a law (Lev. XXIV., 16): blasphemy was to be punished by death by stoning. (6) Pilate confers with Jesus (vs. 8-12): within the palace. 11. From above: from God. Governments are ordained of God. The greater sin: Caiaphas and the Jewish leaders sinned against greater light, filled an office more especially ordained of God, and were trying to persuade Pilate to disregard the duties of his office. (7) The Jews accomplish their purpose (vs. 12-16). 12. Sabbath: i.e., a hill. It was a tessellated pavement on rising ground, outside the palace. 13. Preparation: for the Sabbath, the great day of the feast. Sixth hour: six o'clock, Roman notation, like ours as always in John. This was when Pilate's proceeding began. (8) End of the murderer: Judas hanged himself; Caiaphas was deposed the next year; Pilate was soon deposed, and committed suicide: 40 years after the crucifixion, Jerusalem was destroyed, and many of those very Jews or their children were crucified by the Romans.

SUBJECTS FOR SPECIAL REPORTS.—The mockery.—Why Pilate hesitated to do justice.—The influences that would lead him to do right.—The end of Judas.—Why Pilate was afraid.—Pilate's power given from above.—The greater sin.—What induced Pilate to yield at last.

QUESTIONS.

INTRODUCTORY.—In what books of the Bible is our lesson to day recorded? Give the state of things at the close of our last lesson. When and where did the events of this lesson take place.

SUBJECT.—THE UNJUST DECISION.

I. BY THE SOLDIERS MOCKING CHRIST (vs. 1-3).—How did the soldiers treat Jesus? What was their object? Why was it mean as well as wicked?

II. BY THE JEWS (vs. 4-7).—Where did Pilate bring Jesus? What was his object? What did he say to the Jews? What was their reply? What law of theirs did they charge him with breaking? Would he have been guilty were he not divine?

III. INFLUENCES TO LEAD PILATE TO A RIGHT DECISION (vs. 8-12).—How did Pilate's wife try to influence him? (Matt. XXVII., 19) How did the claim of Jesus to be the Son of God affect him? (v. 8.) Must Pilate have known something of Jesus' miracles? What did Pilate say to Jesus? (v. 9) From whom did Pilate receive his power? Who were greater sinners than even he? Why? How did this saying influence Pilate to release Jesus?

IV. BY PILATE (vs. 12-16).—What was the last argument used by the Jews? Why was this effectual? Where was the final decision rendered? At what time had these things taken place? How did Pilate try to remove from himself all blame for his decision? (Matt. XXVII., 24-26.) In what ways do people now try to throw the blame of their sins on others? What was the final decision? Was Pilate greatly to blame? Are we always to blame if we reject Christ?

V. A GLANCE FORWARD.—What became of Judas? (Matt. XXVII., 3, 10, Ac' I., 18, 19.) What became of Caiaphas? What calamities soon came upon the Jews? What might they have been had they accepted their king? What will be the result to us whether we reject or accept Jesus?

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

I. Vain are our efforts to escape a decision as to what we will do with Jesus.

II. Cowardly fear is the motive not of the Christian, but of those who dare not become Christians.

III. Those who tempt others to sin are worse than their victims.

IV. By rejecting Jesus as king, the Jews, rejected their hope, and glory, and true kingdom.

V. Pilate, by his crime, lost the very things he sought to preserve by it (Matt. XVI., 25).

VI. Men wash their hands from the blame of rejecting Christ by blaming others, or the faults of Christians, or temptations, or bad companions, but all in vain.

REVIEW EXERCISE. (For the whole school in concert).—11. What did the soldiers do to Jesus? ANS. They crowned him with thorns and mocked him. 12. What was Pilate's three-fold testimony to Jesus? ANS. I find no fault in him. 13. What final argument did the Jews bring? ANS. That releasing Jesus would be treason to Rome. 14. What did Pilate then do? ANS. He delivered Jesus up to be crucified.

SUMMER IS GONE.

Summer is gone on swallows' wings, And earth has buried all her flowers. No more the lark, the lark sings, But Silence sits in faded bloom. There is a shadow on the plain Of Winter ere he comes again.

—How.