



"Still one word, as a motto, we will write
Upon the forehead of the newborn year,
May it be ours till faith is lost in sight.
May it be our strong hope to banish fear;
That word is 'hope,' and may its cheering light,
Through storm or sunshine, still be clear and bright."

A FAIR BARBARIAN.

BY FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT.

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

"Don't you think it is nicer out here?" said Octavia.

"My dear," answered Miss Belinda. "Lady Theobald"—She was really quite shocked. "Ah!" interposed Octavia. "I only thought it was cooler."

She preceded them, without seeming to be at all conscious that she was taking the lead.

"You had better pick up your dress, Miss Octavia," said Lady Theobald rather acidly.

The girl glanced over her shoulder at the length of train sweeping the path, but she made no movement toward picking it up.

"It is too much trouble, and one has to duck down so," she said. "It is bad enough to have to keep doing it when one is on the street. Besides, they would never wear out if one took too much care of them."

When they went into the parlor, and sat down, Lady Theobald made excellent use of her time, and managed to hear again all that had tried and bewildered Miss Belinda. She had no hesitation in asking questions boldly; she considered it her privilege to do so, she had catechised Slowbridge for forty years, and meant to maintain her rights until Time played her the knave's trick of disabling her.

In half an hour she had heard about the silver-mines, the gold-diggers, and L'Argentville; she knew that Martin Bassett was a millionaire, if the news he had heard had not left him penniless; that he would return to England, and visit Slowbridge, as soon as his affairs were settled. The precarious condition of his finances did not seem to cause Octavia much concern. She had asked no questions when he went away, and seemed quite at ease regarding the future.

"People will always lend him money, and then he is lucky with it," she said.

She bore the catechising very well. Her replies were frequently rather trying to her interlocutor, but she never seemed troubled, or ashamed of anything she had to say; and she wore, from first to last, that inscrutably innocent and indifferent little air.

She did not even show confusion when Lady Theobald, on going away, made her farewell comment:—

"You are a very fortunate girl to own such jewels," she said, glancing critically at the diamonds in her ears; "but if you take my advice, my dear, you will put them away, and save them until you are a married woman. It is not customary, on this side of the water, for young girls to wear such things—particularly on ordinary occasions. People will think you are odd."

"It is not exactly customary in America," replied Octavia, with her undisturbed smile. "There are not many girls who have such things. Perhaps they would wear them if they had them. I don't care a very great deal about them, but I mean to wear them."

Lady Theobald went away in a dudgeon.

"You will have to exercise your authority, Belinda, and make her put them away," she said to Miss Bassett. "It is absurd—besides being atrocious."

"Make her!" faltered Miss Bassett.

"Yes, 'make her'—though I see you will have your hands full. I never heard such romancing stories in my life. It is just what one might expect from your brother Martin."

When Miss Bassett returned, Octavia was standing before the window, watching the carriage drive away, and playing absently with one of her earrings as she did so.

"What an old fright she is!" was her first guileless remark.

Miss Belinda quite bridled.

"My dear," she said, with dignity, "no one in Slowbridge would think of applying such a phrase to Lady Theobald."

Octavia turned around, and looked at her.

"But don't you think she is one?" she exclaimed. "Perhaps I oughtn't to have said it; but you know we haven't anything as bad as that, even out in Nevada—really!"

"My dear," said Miss Belinda, "different countries contain different people; and in Slowbridge we have our standards,"—her best cap trembling a little with her repressed excitement.

But Octavia did not appear overwhelmed by the existence of the standards in question. She turned to the window again.

"Well, anyway," she said, "I think it was pretty cool in her to order me to take off my diamonds, and save them until I was married. How does she know whether I mean to be married, or not? I don't know that I care about it."

CHAPTER V.

Lucia.

In this manner Slowbridge received the shock which shook it to its foundations, and it was a shock from which it did not recover for some time. Before ten o'clock the next morning everybody knew of the arrival of Martin Bassett's daughter.

The very boarding-school (Miss Pilcher's select seminary for young ladies, "combining the comforts of a home," as the circular said, "with all the advantages of genteel education") was on fire with it, highly-colored versions of the stories told being circulated from the "first class" downward, even taking the form of an Indian Princess, tattooed blue, and with difficulty restrained from indulging in war-whoops,—which last feature so alarmed little Miss Bigbee, aged seven, that she retired in fear and trembling, and shed tears under the bedclothes; her terror and anguish being much increased by the stirring recitals of scalp-stories by pretty Miss Phipps, of the first class—a young person who possessed a vivid imagination, and delighted in romances of a tragic turn.

"I have not the slightest doubt," said Miss Phipps, "that when she is at home she lives in a wampum."

"What is a wampum?" inquired one of her admiring audience.

"A tent," replied Miss Phipps, with some impatience. "I should think any goose would know that. It is a kind of tent hung with scalps and—moccasins, and—lariats—and things of that sort."

"I don't believe that is the right name for it," put in Miss Smith, who was a pert member of the third class.

"Ah!" commented Miss Phipps, "that was Miss Smith who spoke, of course. We may always expect information from Miss Smith. I trust that I may be allowed to say that I think I have a brother!"

"He doesn't know much about it, if he calls a wigwam a wampum," interposed Miss Smith, with still greater pertness. "I have a brother who knows better than that, if I am only in the third class."

For a moment Miss Phipps appeared to be meditating. Perhaps she was a trifle discomfited; but she recovered herself after a brief pause, and returned to the charge.

"Well," she remarked, "perhaps it is a wigwam. Who cares if it is? And at any rate, whatever it is, I haven't the slightest doubt that she lives in one."

This comparatively tame version was, however, entirely discarded when the diamonds and silver-mines began to figure more largely in the reports. Certainly, pretty, overdressed, jewel-bedecked Octavia gave Slowbridge abundant cause for excitement.

After leaving her, Lady Theobald drove home to Oldclough Hall, rather out of humor. She had been rather out of humor for some time, having never quite recovered from her anger at the daring of that cheerful builder of mills, Mr. John Burmestone. Mr. Burmestone had been one innovation, and Octavia Bassett was another. She had not been able to manage Mr. Burmestone, and she was not at all sure that she had managed Octavia Bassett.

She entered the dining-room with an ominous frown on her forehead.

At the end of the table, opposite her own seat, was a vacant chair, and her frown deepened when she saw it.

"Where is Miss Gaston?" she demanded of the servant.

Before the man had time to reply, the door opened,

and a girl came in hurriedly, with a somewhat frightened air.

"I beg pardon, grandmamma dear," she said, going to her seat quickly. "I did not know you had come home."

"We have a dinner-hour," announced her ladyship, "and I do not disregard it."

"I am very sorry," faltered the culprit.

"That is enough, Lucia," interrupted Lady Theobald; and Lucia dropped her eyes, and began to eat her soup with nervous haste. In fact, she was glad to escape so easily.

She was a very pretty creature, with brown eyes, a soft white skin, and a slight figure with a reed-like grace. A great quantity of brown hair was twisted into an ugly coil on the top of her delicate little head, and she wore an ugly muslin gown of Miss Chickie's make.

For some time the meal progressed in dead silence; but at length Lucia ventured to raise her eyes.

"I have been walking in Slowbridge, grandmamma," she said, "and I met Mr. Burmestone, who told me that Miss Bassett has a visitor—a young lady from America."

Lady Theobald laid her knife and fork down deliberately.

"Mr. Burmestone?" she said. "Did I understand you to say that you stopped on the roadside to converse with Mr. Burmestone?"

Lucia colored up to her delicate eyebrows and above them.

"I was trying to reach a flower growing on the bank," she said, "and he was so kind as to stop to get it for me. I did not know he was near at first. And then he inquired how you were—and told me he had just heard about the young lady."

"Naturally!" remarked her ladyship sardonically. "It is as I anticipated it would be. We shall find Mr. Burmestone at our elbows upon all occasions. And he will not allow himself to be easily driven away. He is as determined as persons of his class usually are."

"Oh grandmamma!" protested Lucia, with innocent fervor. "I really do not think he is—like that at all. I could not help thinking he was very gentlemanly and kind. He is so much interested in your school, and so anxious that it should prosper."

"May I ask," inquired Lady Theobald, "how long a time this generous expression of his sentiments occupied? Was this the reason of your forgetting the dinner-hour?"

"We did not"—said Lucia guiltily: "it did not take many minutes. I—I do not think that made me late."

Lady Theobald dismissed this paltry excuse with one remark,—a remark made in the deep tones referred to once before.

"I should scarcely have expected," she observed, "that a granddaughter of mine would have spent half an hour conversing on the public road with the proprietor of Slowbridge Mills."

"Oh grandmamma!" exclaimed Lucia, the tears rising in her eyes: "it was not half an hour."

"I should scarcely have expected," replied her ladyship, "that a granddaughter of mine would have spent five minutes conversing on the public road with the proprietor of Slowbridge Mills."

To this assault there seemed to be no reply to make. Lady Theobald had her granddaughter under excellent control. Under her rigorous rule, the girl—whose mother had died at her birth—had been brought up. At nineteen she was simple, sensitive, shy. She had been permitted to have no companions, and the greatest excitements of her life had been the Slowbridge tea-parties. Of the late Sir Gilbert Theobald, the less said the better. He had spent very little of his married life at Oldclough Hall, and upon his death his widow had found herself possessed of a substantial, gloomy mansion, an exalted position in Slowbridge society, and a small marriage-settlement, upon which she might make all the efforts she chose to sustain her state. So Lucia wore her dresses a much longer time than any other Slowbridge young lady; she was obliged to mend her little gloves again and again; and her hats were retrimmed so often that even Slowbridge thought them old-fashioned. But she was too simple and sweet-natured to be much troubled, and indeed thought very little about the matter. She was only troubled when Lady Theobald scolded her, which was by no means infrequently. Perhaps the straits to