

Our Story.

BARBARA STREET.

A FAMILY STORY OF TODAY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "OUR NELL," "A LADY'S DAUGHTER," ETC.

CHAPTER VII. SHYLOCK.

"I SHOULD very much like to be disturbed!" he said; and then he walked to the fire and deposited the cat on the hearth rug, where she curled herself up, and seemed quite at home.

"Come and see how comfortable she looks!" he said.

Kitty, who had stood at the open door, wishing to run away, but without the necessary courage, advanced a few steps into the room, and peered uncomfortably over the top of the table.

"But I am afraid she won't speak to me," said Waterhouse with pathos in his tone, looking at the cat reflectively, and shaking his head.

"Do you want somebody to speak to?" asked Kitty, a new idea having entered her head, which inspired her to this bold utterance, and even to a glance up into the lodger's face.

"Of course I do," said Waterhouse, arresting the little maiden's eyes with his kindly grey ones; "would not you if you were shut up by yourself all day long, and had no mother or sisters to talk to you?"

What Kitty would have replied out of the fulness of her compassionate heart cannot be told, for she heard the dining-room door open, and the sound recalled her to a sense of her position.

"Oh, I think I must go; I think they want me," she stammered hastily, and fled, closing the door gently behind her. For the rest of the day Waterhouse was left to his own meditations, which were enlivened by the sounds of clear girlish voices singing hymns and scraps from the oratorios down-stairs.

His name was entirely omitted from the family talk that day, but their remarks would not have been cheering to him had he heard them, for Sarah had been seen that afternoon for the first time going out in the sealskin jacket, much too small for her, and tied across her broad shoulders with ribbons, and it was not considered a mark of good taste on the gentleman's part that he should have given it to the servant, not to speak of the really criminal extravagance the act implied. But one little voice was heard in defence of the lodger. Kitty spoke out quite boldly, and said she was sure he did not mean it, and that he had the nicest face for a man that she had ever seen. But of course she only got laughed at, being pressed to explain what Lothair did not mean, and rallied on her impressionable little heart.

Not many days after this dreary Sunday there came a change in the lodger's outlook, which seemed to promise better things for him. One day Sarah had, as usual, carried up the first course of his dinner at seven o'clock. It consisted of a sole fried to the perfect shade of brown by Grace's acute mind and nimble fingers, for the cooking of which Sarah received a compliment which, in accordance with instructions, she did not disclaim. She came down again to the kitchen with dismay in her face.

There, Miss Grace, if I haven't forgot to tell you about the sugar? We haven't a ha'porth in the house, and him with a tart for his pudding."

Sarah always called Waterhouse by the masculine pronoun simply, and Grace contended that there was no reason why the servant should not use a nickname as well as her mistress, especially since it was terse and euphonious.

"You unlucky creature!" said Grace, "and I have nothing else to send up, and this rhubarb is sourness itself. Never mind; take up the cutlet, and ask him to excuse you, and then fly like the wind to the grocer's. I would have asked Miss Kitty to go, but it is too cold for her, and you will be back long before he can be ready for the tart."

But Grace's calculations were destined to be upset by an unforeseen occurrence; almost as soon as Sarah was gone, Mr. Waterhouse rang his bell. There was nothing for it but for Grace to answer it. She turned down her sleeves, and smoothed her hair, and indulged in a little grimace at her own expense. Then she went up and opened the door. When Waterhouse saw who it was, he rose, and was a little awkward in apologising. But the apology Grace scarcely heard, for her cheeks were burning with shame and indignation. A moment had sufficed to reveal to her that Sarah had been taking advantage of her mistress's back to neglect the lodger's comfort quite shamefully. There was an unwelcome heath; the curtains were not drawn over the windows; there was an untidy cheerless air about the room. The tablecloth was spread over only a portion of the table—the remaining portion being littered with books and papers. It was obvious at the first glance that Waterhouse had not summoned attention without justification, for he sat forlorn and spoonless before the already cold cutlet. Grace glanced round for the plate basket; it was not in the room, but had been placed outside the door, as if the object were to remove it just beyond its sphere of usefulness. Grace, after supplying the diner's needs, drew the curtains and put a rectifying touch here and there. Her face did not invite remark, and Waterhouse advanced none, but watched her slyly, with much interest. Before she left the room, she asked, in a stern tone as though Waterhouse were himself the culprit—

"Is this a specimen of the sort of way Sarah has been attending to you?"

"This a specimen? Why, I don't see much the matter. These little things don't make any difference to me."

"They make a great deal to me Sarah has disgraced us."

"Oh, come! that's too strong. She's a willing sort of soul, but you should take into consideration that she has not a good head-piece."

But Waterhouse's intervention on her behalf had no effect in moderating Grace's feelings towards Sarah, and that unfortunate individual was met on her return by a reception which reduced her to a condition of tearful depression calculated to last some days. Grace only made one remark to her.

"Sarah, I am sorry to say you have disgraced us, and destroyed my respect for you. You have not done your work for Mr. Waterhouse as you would have done had you thought I should see it."

Sarah, not being pert by nature, made no reply, but at once burst into tears. She was conscious in her heart that Grace's speech was unjust, but she could not probably have hit on the reason why, and had she done so would not have been willing to con-

less it, since the most stupid people like as little as their betters to exchange an accusation of wickedness for one of incapacity. The fact was she did not deliberately do worse out of her mistress's ken but her feeble shiftless nature required stringing up with the animating consciousness of oversight. She had begun by paying great attention to the lodger and his comforts, having a great idea of the probable extent of his requiringness; and feeling considerable gratitude for favours to come. But in the course of a few days she perceived with much perplexity that her attentions were very little noticed by the lodger, and that she could neglect with impunity. After this discovery the downward course was naturally rapid. Grace said no more, but neither did she relent. She went about silently, with a very stern face and a peculiar kind of stork which her family regarded as indicating temper. But what had happened was not made public till the next day. During the afternoon Hester came upon Grace sitting alone in the dining-room. Grace had apparently recovered her temper, for she was laughing over a book she held in her hand. Hester came up behind her, and looked over her shoulder.

"The Complete Housemaid!" she exclaimed.

"You freakish creature, where did you get hold of that, and what amusement can you find in it?"

"It belongs to Sarah, and it is an absurd book. I can do better out of my own head," and Grace threw down the book.

"What can you do better out of your own head?"

"Wait at table."

"What do you mean?"

"That I am going to be Hebe to our Jove upstairs."

"Come, Grace, be serious for once."

"If I am to be serious I will say that Sarah has disgraced us, and that Mr. Waterhouse's comfort has been shamefully neglected, and that I am going to wait upon him myself in future."

Hester was so painfully shocked that for a time she could not speak. She came forward slowly and stood on the hearthrug before Grace, but without looking at her.

"It is impossible you can mean to lower us so," she said at length, with evident effort.

"I do not consider that I am lowering us," Grace replied, with a distinct ring of pride in her voice.

Another pause ensued, in which Hester's feeling clamoured for expression. At last it broke all bounds.

"Is it not enough that we must come down to letting lodgings, without making yourself this man's servant? Had I not better take a place as scullery-maid at once? I should get money by it. Where do you mean to draw the line?"

Grace showed no sign of resenting this speech, and her voice had taken its usual merry tone when she replied—

"Sit down, my lady Hester, and don't look so dreadfully tall, and I will reason with you. I will tell you where I draw the line; and that is, against taking two guineas a week from a man, and having him abominably ill-served. That's where I draw the line."

Hester did not sit down. She knew that the matter was hopeless. Where Grace put down her foot, no force would induce her to dislodge it. She was silent.

"Hester," said Grace, after a pause, in a more serious tone, "since we have no one to annoy by it, why should we not let lodgings? We only stand or fall to ourselves in the matter; for I suppose you care no more than I do what the neighbours, or the lodger thinks of us. It seems to me a most admirable plan for keeping all together, and dispensing with the dreadful governess idea, while we really get more money by it; and if we do not lose our own self-respect, it seems to me, it does no harm. By looking at it in the way you do, you are just seeking to extract poison from what would be quite harmless, if you let it alone. But why did you not express your feelings more strongly about it at the time?"

"Would it have been of any use?" asked Hester, with some point.

Grace gave a little shrug, and a sly curl came into the corners of her mouth as she made the admission—

"Perhaps not."

This easy candour irritated Hester.

"Does mother know what you are intending to do?"

"I don't think she will make any objection," said Grace, carelessly.

"I am surprised, Grace, that you like to have mother so entirely under your influence."

"What can't be cured must be endured." Grace spoke lightly, but Hester's words had startled her.

"It is a dangerous position, that of having everybody under one's will." There was a tremor in Hester's voice which did not escape Grace's attention. She drew down her eyebrows thoughtfully, and looked at Hester gravely.

"Why so?" she asked.

"Because there is the temptation to ride roughshod over other people's feelings." There were tears in Hester's eyes now, as well as in her voice.

Grace rose and went to her, and put her arms round her waist as she stood.

"Am I so careless of your feelings?" she asked, looking up into Hester's face. "I am too fond of my own way, and that is a fact; and the worst of it is, she continued, smiling in spite of herself, that my own way has a knack of looking the best. But, Hester, assert yourself, my dear; enter the lists with me—let us fight about our views until the most reasonable wins."

Hester shook her head with a melancholy smile, and the tears brimmed over, and ran down her cheeks. She knew that for such a contest they would be too unevenly matched. Even now Grace was looking up at her with a half-brightly comic half sweetly pensive face, such as it was quite impossible to resist. So poor Hester, smiling through her tears, stooped, and kissed her, and said—

"You provoking charming thing, what would be the use? I have only this morning expressed my opinion, and are you not intending just the same to follow your own?"

"Why, yes," said Grace, with a little grimace; and there the discussion ended. Hester made no further remark even when she saw Grace shortly afterwards, with Kitty helping her, nimbly engaged in making up a muslin cap and a dainty apron, the use of which was obvious. When they were finished, she put them on, and coming up to her mother, made a curtsy, and announced demurely—

"My dignity-preservers."

"That is an ironical name, my love," said Mrs. Norris, smiling faintly.

"Not at all, mother, for they will be the outward and visible signs of an inward meekness, sobriety, and reserve from which I trust never to swerve as long as I am equipped in them. It is a fact that

I would no more undertake to do my work without them, than I would do my errands in the Chester Road in a dressing-gown and slippers. I have been thinking a great deal of this mental phenomenon, and I am going to submit it to Mr. Carlyle in illustration of the clothes theory."

And so it came to pass that evening that instead of the shuffling figure of the big Sarah, with her large shiftless hands and ineffectual movements, Waterhouse was waited upon by a light person, with small quick hands, twinkling feet, and dainty neatness of attire, and an evident intention to elevate dining, in his case, into a fine art. It was an agreeable change, doubtless, and Waterhouse felt it so; yet it had its less pleasing aspects, to say the least of it. When he beheld the young lady come into his room attired in the livery of servitude, he comprehended the matter from the actual point of view in a moment. It was uncomfortable and embarrassing, and he blushed, while the young lady was coolness and composure itself, though inwardly much disquieted concerning those last touches in the culinary department which she had been obliged to leave to Sarah. Waterhouse rose, and would have made an expostulation, but he did not get very far, for Grace, who had foreseen the emergency, brought out her neat little prepared speech—

"Pray forgive my interrupting you; but you will oblige us all very much if you will take my services as a matter of course. Please treat me just as you would the housemaid I represent, and whom we would gladly provide for you were we able. But as we cannot do that, you will be very kind if you will accept, without question, the best substitute we can provide."

So spoke Grace, and Waterhouse had clearly no alternative, in common chivalry, but to concur without any fuss in the new arrangement. This was the easier, as it was by no means that Grace Norris whom he had met in the fog, who now waited upon him. Indeed, he felt inclined to believe that that vivacious friendly creature existed only in his imagination, as he watched this icicle of a girl move sedately about the room, attending to his wants with the gravest of faces, and the demurest of manners. If this was to be the state of things for very long, Waterhouse felt he should wish Sarah back again. She was, at any rate, good-natured and sociable, and he could extract some grains of amusement from her aimless talk. His present attendant seemed inclined to be neither, and to expect him to eat his dinner with the severest gravity of demeanour. But Waterhouse felt that such a state of things could not last long.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SUN AND THE WIND.

FOR some days after, Grace showed Hester more than usual affection, as if to atone for her victory in the matter of the waiting. She treated her even caressingly, occasionally perching herself on Hester's knee, and requesting to be made a baby of, which had as striking an effect as the condescension of a royal personage. Hester, who had a passion for being loved, visibly brightened under this treatment. It is one of the satires discoverable in the very satirical region of human character that an inordinate yearning to be loved is not necessarily coincident with the tendency oneself to love, and so is condemned in the very nature of things to remain unsatisfied, for it is love which begets love. In this family it was Grace that loved, and Hester that desired to be loved, and there is so much meaning in that distinction, that, but for it, the story of these two girls would not have come to be set down as it is. It would, perhaps, be safe to say that Grace had never in her life devoted a moment to the wish to be loved by the people around her. Her own love for them, and theirs for her, made the atmosphere of her mental life, just as the air and sunlight made that of her physical, and her thoughts were occupied with one no more than with the other. Every one loved her, and she was happy—It might, perhaps, be nearer the truth to say, she was unhappy, and every one loved her. Now, Hester carries a somewhat unjust sound with it, and we are inclined to shake our heads over the shallowness of human judgments. Why, we ask, should the cheerful light-hearted people, who have so great a pull over others in their very constitution, get all the appreciation and affection, which it costs them so much less than those others to earn? This was the question that was ever recurring to poor Hester's mind. But here we must join issue with her, and state it as our conviction that life is not so unjust as it seems, and that people get, on the whole, a very fair judgment dealt out to them. If we search at all carefully the springs of human action, we shall be inclined to come to the conclusion that, roughly speaking, a happy disposition is an unselfish one, and vice versa. This happy nature is often that which is born with an unselfish strain, and is urged by its constitution to that self-abnegation and those ever-recurring contests with inclination whose outward result is a temper so light-hearted and equable that we think it is gained without pain or effort. But the effort is there, and is no less painful than with us, except that, like any other arduous habit, it becomes less so by repetition.

Was Hester right when she put down Grace's joyousness to her lack of sensitiveness? Did Grace never feel temptations to despond, to be lazy, to be cross? Did she expend her energies in making people comfortable simply because she liked exertion? Was it because she never felt ill that she was never heard to complain, except in a cheerful way, or seen with the relaxed facial muscles which are ordinary human nature's resource under physical discomfort? And when other people were ill, and the general outlook gloomy, was it because such things did not affect Grace, that she was the one looked to as a matter of course to do the nursing and generally put matters to rights, or, if that was not possible, to put a good face upon them? To all these questions I make no reply, leaving them to be answered by my readers as they follow the fortunes of the two girls, only stipulating that if justice be given to Grace it shall not be denied to Hester. For, are not all of us who are made of common human clay, conscious that, without being badly disposed, the virtues of our fellow-men are not always without a little sting for us, especially if they gain a reward in the affections we are fain to crave for ourselves? And among Grace's virtues was certainly not that of a readiness to give up her own way, compared with which, as a sweetener of life to one's self-willed fellows, other virtues fall quite into the shade. Hester was decidedly self-willed, and felt that her opinions deserved a hearing, and that she was not destined by nature to become a mere echo of Grace, as others were.

(To be continued.)

Sabbath School Work.

LESSON HELPS.

(Selected from Peloubat.)

MESSIAH'S MESSENGER.

LESSON XII., March 21st, Mal. iii., 1-6; 17; 1-6, memorize verses 10, 1-3

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me."—Mal. iii., 1.

TIME.—Probably 424-408. At the same time with Nehemiah's second visit to Jerusalem (Neh. xiii., 6).

PLACE.—Jerusalem. CONTEMPORARY HISTORY.—Darius II. (Neh. ii.), Persian emperor, B.C. 423-404. Nehemiah, governor of the Jews' Sacrales, teaching at Athens, with Plato for his pupil. Herodotus nearly through his travels, 454-400. Xenophon (444-354) leads the retreat of the 10,000 (400).

PLACE IN BIBLE HISTORY.—Malachi corresponds with the last chapter of Nehemiah.

MALACHI Means "Messenger of Jehovah." He was the last of the prophets. He was a Jew, contemporary with Nehemiah in his second visit to Jerusalem, lived between 444 and 400 B.C. Of his personal history nothing is known.

THE BOOK OF MALACHI.—Consists of the words of Malachi himself, adding Nehemiah in his reforms, and encouraging the people with a vision of the future. Date of writing, about B.C. 400, at Jerusalem.

INTRODUCTION.—Half a century after the story of Esther, we turn again to the reformation under Nehemiah (Les. ix., 2) in Jerusalem. After remaining there for twelve years he went back to Persia. How long he staid we do not know, but several years, and then he returned to Jerusalem. At this time Malachi appears and aids him in his reformation. What needed to be done can be seen from Nehemiah, chap. xiii., and Malachi, chaps. i.-iii.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.—1. I: God. My messenger: John the Baptist (Luke vii., 27). Before me: God in the person of His Messiah, Jesus Christ. Whom ye seek: they were looking for a deliverer and a king to bring the times promised by Isaiah (chaps. ix., xliii.) Messenger of the covenant: the one covenant or promised (Gen. xxii., 15-18; Isa. liii., 13-15; chaps. llii., lx. lxli), and the one who would make a new and better covenant between them and God (Heb. viii., 6-13). 2. But who may abide: he will be very different from their expectations. A refiner's fire: their trials were to purify them. And Christ, by His character and life and demand for faith, would separate the good from the bad. Fullers: one who cleans or scour's cloth. Soap: iye. Our soap was not then known. 3. Sit as a refiner: the refiner sits that he may watch carefully the process of refining, and not beat the metal too hot or too long. 4. For I change not: I will keep the promises I have made, and adhere to my plan of making you the people of God. Therefore I refuse, not destroy, by the troubles I send upon you. 5. The day cometh: this refers first to the troubles that come upon the Jews, especially the destruction of Jerusalem, and this is a type of the punishment of all sinners. 2. Sun of righteousness: being to God's people what the sun is to the world—a bringer of light, life, comfort, power, fruit. Wings: rays. As calves of the stall: they should go out from their troublous times as joyfully as a calf shut up in the stall bounds and frisks when let out into the field. 5. Elijah: see Matt. xi., 14; Mark ix., 11, 12.

SUBJECTS FOR SPECIAL REPORTS.—Malachi. —His connection with Nehemiah.—The evils that needed to be reformed.—"My messenger."—"The messenger of the covenant."—Refiner's fire.—Fullers' soap.—Christ as a witness against wrong.—The day that shall burn as an oven.—Christ as the sun of righteousness.

LEARN BY HEART.—Malachi iii., 1-3, iv., 2, Ps. lxxiv., 11.

QUESTIONS.

INTRODUCTORY.—How many years after Esther was Malachi? Who was Malachi? When did he live? When did he prophesy? What great man's reforms did he aid? Where in the Bible history does his prophecy belong?

SUBJECT: THE COMING OF THE SAVIOUR.

I. THE NEED OF A SAVIOUR.—How long did Nehemiah remain at Jerusalem? When did he go back to Persia? (Neh. xiii., 6.) Did he return to Jerusalem? (Neh. xiii., 7.) What evils did he find prevalent there? (Neh. xiii., 4, 5, 7, 10, 15, 16, 23, 28, 29.) What ones are mentioned by Malachi? (Chaps. i., 6-8, 13; ii., 8, 11, 17; iii., 8, 15.)

Are such sins common now in our land? What are the great sins? What need have we personally of a Saviour?

II. PREPARATION FOR THE SAVIOUR (v. 1, and chap. iv., 5, 6).—What is meant by "my messenger"? (Luke vii., 27.) What is he called in v. 5? (See Matt. xi., 14; Mark ix., 11, 12.) What is meant by preparing the way? (Isa. xl., 3-5.) Before whom?

How did John the Baptist prepare the way for Christ? (v. 6.) Is there the need of like preparation for Christ in each of our hearts?

III. THE COMING OF THE SAVIOUR (v. 1). Who is meant by the messenger of the covenant, and why? How did Christ come? Where? Why were the Jews seeking him? (Isa. xl., 5-11; lx., 1-22; lxi., 1-11.)

Would these results come in the way they expected? Were they disappointed when he actually came? Do men now have expectations of an outward Heaven without realizing the change that must be made in them before it can be theirs?

IV. THE MISSION OF THE SAVIOUR (vs. 2-6 and 1-4).—In what respect was Christ like a refiner's fire? Like fullers' soap? Why does the refiner sit at his work? What would be the result? (v. 4.) What would Christ be to sinners? Is His religion opposed to every sin? What day is referred to "that shall burn as an oven"? In what respect is Christ like the sun? Meaning of last clause in v. 2? How does Christ cause men to keep the commandments of Moses?

A TERTOTAL POLITICIAN.—We are often told that public men and politicians especially must take a glass with those who do. The statement is a poor compliment to any man's ability, and we are glad to know that there are many exceptions to this poor rule. The latest we have noted is the case of Mr. Robert Stout, the present prime-minister of New Zealand, who is an enthusiastic teetotaler.