

Our Story.

BARBARA STREET.

A FAMILY STORY OF TO-DAY.

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

CHAPTER XXXII. (Continued.)

"Ah," said Waterhouse, who had been listening eagerly, "What a mistake that is! Reason is quite out of court in such matters, isn't it, Mrs. Norris? After reason has thoroughly tired you out and led you nowhere, you have to fall back on the instincts that were put into you, and were meant to have a voice. I used to rack my brains on the subject once, but I have never done so since my father died. I always think, 'Well he's up there, and knows about everything, and I shall go some day or other, and there's an end to my speculation.'"

Denston was looking on the ground thoughtfully.

Grace, who had glanced at Waterhouse, observed, approvingly, that he had evidently lost that consciousness of her presence which had at first betrayed in his manner.

"Well, Waterhouse," said Denston, rousing himself, "that is what I should call the logic of the affections; and why shouldn't they have a logic, seeing that affection is undoubtedly as real a thing as thought?"

"Mr. Denston," said Mrs. Norris, "when you send a loved one yonder, you will no more require a logic than Mr. Waterhouse or I."

"If that is so," said Hester, suddenly, and for the first time looking up, "it is not wonderful that we should have been told so little about heaven, perhaps our brains would not have understood what must be so different from anything we have known here, and so the matter was left to our hearts, which do not need to understand."

"That is such a beautiful idea that it must be true, Hester," said Grace smiling at her sister.

Hester blushed and was silent. Sarah came in with tea, and there was a general move.

When tea was over, and during the bustle of movement that followed, Waterhouse took Mrs. Norris aside for a moment's private consultation. Meanwhile Denston walked with deliberation to where Grace was standing and addressed her.

"You have had no news of Charlie Potter, I suppose, since he went to Brighton?"

He had not addressed her before; but once, during the course of tea, raising her eyes on a sudden, she had encountered Mr. Denston's, which were fixed on her with a look of such painful intensity that they caused her to catch her breath involuntarily, and arrested her own gaze, till he released her by lowering his. Now, the set purpose evident in his way of approaching her turned her cold with a sense of realised dread, and to reply naturally to his very ordinary remark required a great effort. She could not look up; that was impossible. She hardly knew what she replied.

But Denston, whether he observed her embarrassment or not, did not let the conversation drop. He continued to talk of the Potters, and to ask questions which had to be answered. At last he said, questioningly—

"I suppose you will not, under present circumstances, be going out to-morrow morning to do your marketing?"

Then, indeed, he surprised a fugitive glance from Grace's eyes—a frightened glance. Denston did not press for a reply. Waterhouse had now finished his discussion, and was waiting for him, and both men immediately took leave, and went up to Waterhouse's room, where, before proceeding to the business which he had proposed to discuss, Waterhouse could not resist the opportunity of letting off a little of his enthusiasm in the ears of a friend.

"Don't you feel extraordinarily content in that atmosphere down stairs?" he said. "I never had anything to do with women before, you know, except in society. I always wanted to know real family life. What a lucky dog I was to fall in with these people! But one has a sort of instinct in such matters. I knew I should be happy in this house directly I stepped over the threshold."

"My eloquent counsel of last night," said Denston, dryly, "is still working successfully, I see. Your despair is on the mend."

"You're right," replied Waterhouse; and now, my dear fellow, to business, which, I hope, I shall be able to settle as I wish. The fact is, I'm very much worried about my affairs at the Cape; my agents there are making a mess of them. I've a considerable property out there, of one sort and another, which I want to get off my hands advantageously. They have not found purchasers yet, and I've been in England nine months, during which time the farms have, I have no reason to doubt, been going to the dogs as fast as they can. Now, I must either go out and see after them myself (which I don't want to do), or send some one else whom I can trust as I should myself."

Waterhouse had stood delivering these remarks in a calmly argumentative tone, contrasting forcibly with his previous enthusiastic one. But his eye betrayed some anxiety. He now paused, but Denston did not speak. He was seated and leaning forward, and Waterhouse could not see his face.

"I'll not beat about the bush," continued Waterhouse, more energetically. "Will you go, and thereby do me an immense service?"

There was a pause; then Denston replied with out lifting his head—

"The service and the business are alike apocryphal. They are a mere cover to enable you to do me a service."

"Denston, upon my word, you're a fool! Excuse my strong language, but really your remarks are insufferably absurd."

"Asseveration will not serve your turn."

"By no means, I've got documents," as some one or other says—facts enough to burst any empty bubble of objection. But you ought to know my affairs, being in Burrows' office. However, we'll go into them all by-and-by. The question is, now, will you go?"

"You've taken me by surprise," said Denston, slowly. "I can't reply to such a proposal off-hand. There are difficulties—great ones—to prevent my saying yes. But neither, I suppose, has a man a right to throw away lightly a chance of prolonging his life."

He rose as he spoke, and something in his look awoke a stronger sympathy in Waterhouse.

"But, if you will excuse me," he continued, "I would rather think the matter over before we go any further into it."

"By all means," replied Waterhouse, cordially pressing his hand, "but pray remember in your deliberations that this is no tomfoolery of delicacy

on my part. You would be doing me a really great service, and one that would be worth any amount of coin to me."

"Ah," said Denston, "there it is. If I could do the service for you as one friend should for another—but you see I am not only penniless, but have ties."

"The thing's not on a footing of friendship at all," said Waterhouse, impatiently; "it's a matter of pure business. I should have to pay through the nose if I sent anyone else, and why not you, if you care to do it?"

"Plain speech for ever!" said Denston, and Waterhouse laughed. He accompanied Denston, to the door and shook hands again.

"It's the she-dragon that stands in the way," he reflected, as he went up-stairs again.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HESTER PROVED.

When Grace rose the next morning she found herself so very unwell that it was a difficult matter to get through her toilette. Her limbs trembled, her head swam, and a wretched languor oppressed her.

But her spirit seldom allowed her to give way to physical sensations without a hard struggle. Downstairs the heaviness of her eyes was noticed, and the fact that she could not eat any breakfast; but she parried anxious questions with light answers, and proceeded afterwards to her occupations as usual. Later on in the day, however, she was compelled to give up the struggle, and went off to lie down upstairs unknown to the others.

Hester, however, who was very ill at ease about her sister, discovered her there very soon.

"It is my turn now," she said, sitting down by the bedside, "to take care of you."

"I don't need taking care of," said Grace. "I have only a slight headache. I shall be better if I rest quietly till tea-time."

This did not afford Hester much encouragement to remain. Having, however, something to say which she had made up her mind must be said, she remained seated. For some time there was silence. She changed her position incessantly, and would have liked to groan, had Hester not been there. Her condition was the result of nervous over-excitement, and of an intolerable uncertainty and misery concerning her position which had returned to her in full force the night before, and kept her awake far into the night, which was the second that had passed without bringing much sleep.

Hester said presently, with some timidity—

"Grace, I am sure you are very miserable, and if you would talk to me about it, and we could do something, I'm sure it would do you more good than trying to rest."

Grace ceased to turn her head from side to side. She listened with eager surprise. She was struck not only by her sister's penetration, but by the courage with which she broached the subject which Grace herself had not dared to approach.

Hester was the last person with whom she would have thought of discussing the matter—poor Hester, to whom it would be so inexpressibly painful.

"I don't think I should have required your own words the other evening," continued Hester, "to find out yesterday that you were in a wrong position somehow. I never saw you look so miserable, Grace."

"Oh, Hester," said Grace, half springing up, "what do you imagine he thinks? How did his manner strike you?"

"He, too, looked very unhappy—that much was plain."

"Yes, but did you see the way in which he looked up at me at tea, and afterwards? Didn't it appear to you that he seemed to appropriate me? Did you hear him ask me if I was going out this morning? Oh, it made me shudder! I shudder now to think of it."

"Poor Grace," said Hester, and there was in her tone, with all its sympathy, a suggestion of irony, which was pathetic, coming from a heart which felt its own pangs keenly just then. "Grace was silent, recalled to a sense of whom she was talking to."

"But why haven't you done something?" continued Hester. "How can you leave him in doubt for a single hour which is not unavoidable?"

"Hester, don't you know how impossible it seems to strike a blow like that? Think what injuries we already have to make up, and then to add this to them!"

"No injury could be so great, as it seems to me, Grace, as to deceive a man on such a matter. One had only to look at Mr. Denston yesterday. Hester's voice sank very low, "to see how he loved you, and it is cruel to keep him in suspense."

"But suppose I should—suppose I never deceive him?"

"Oh Grace," cried Hester, as though struck by a sudden blow, "but you know you couldn't do such a thing; you could not wrong him so; of course you are talking nonsense. It would not be possible for any woman to act like that, and you less than any one. If you had ever loved, if you loved any one else, you could not say such a thing; even in jest."

Hester ended in what sounded like a sob.

"No," said Grace, after a pause, with all her usual energy; "of course, I could not do it. I have known in my heart I could not, all along, and especially since I hated so to have him look at me and come near me yesterday. But, Hester, I dare not tell him so, and every hour seems to make me feel more committed. I have so hoped against hope that he would make some sign. He must have seen that I did not feel towards him as he wished, and yet he takes no step to release me. You see, he must be intending to accept the sacrifice; and if he is, how can I in honour deny him? You don't know how passionately I assured him that I would make any sacrifice to atone."

Hester was silent for a time, and then she said, in a tone of calm resolution—

"Grace, I will see him for you. I have just heard that Mr. Waterhouse has proposed his going out to the Cape to do business for him. He has given no answer yet, and evidently hesitates. You know it is probably a question of saving his life. He would stay some time. Mr. Waterhouse would keep him there, he tells mother, till it was quite safe for him to live in England again. I want to tell him, Grace, that I would stay with Georgina; that might make some difference. That is, of course, if you and mother approve. I could still teach Kitty, and should try to get other pupils."

"Oh, Hester!" exclaimed Grace, and for a time she seemed unable to say more. "How can I let you take all the burden, and I bear none?" she said at last. "But I can say nothing to dissuade you, nor will mother, when she knows all. I can hardly envy you the chance of doing something to atone. My poor good Hester!"

Grace had seized Hester's hand, and was stroking it softly. Hester began to sob, not being in a

condition to withstand the sympathy. But she checked herself by-and-by when Grace said—

"I am sure, dearest, you must not see Mr. Denston. I could not think of it. You are not strong enough for such a painfully difficult task. Besides, what will you say? Hester, do you think his hesitation about going away had anything to do with me? But he could not be so foolish!" Grace shuddered.

But Hester would not be turned from her purpose. She had set her mind upon seeing Mr. Denston. It could not be done by Grace herself, and some one must do it. A letter would not answer the purpose, because it would be too bald and definite. She would begin by proposing to stay with his sister in his absence, and then she would try to find out his attitude towards Grace, and somehow, in some way, she would make Grace's feelings plain. Grace, finding Hester obstinate, and perceiving, greatly to her surprise, that she really desired the interview, did not press her opposition. Hester's manner was too self-reliant, and her judgment too wisely and calmly expressed, to warrant further interference with her wishes.

"Hester," said Grace, finally, in a solemn tone, "if he does not then release me, I will do no more. If he wishes to tie me, when he understands how I feel, I will be tied."

Hester smiled. "What kind of a man do you take him for, Grace? Do you know that you are insulting him by speaking so? I am surprised you understand so little!"

"Your tone comforts me, my dear Hester. But you are a comfort altogether. I am beginning to feel as if I possessed myself again. I was very nearly past recall altogether, I assure you. I never can thank you as I ought."

"I don't want any thanks," began Hester, but her voice broke suddenly, and slipping down on her knees she leaned her head on her sister's arm and cried for a long time. She knew that Grace understood, and that she need fear neither questioning nor too obtrusive sympathy. As for Grace, she did not marvel at the tears, but rather at the unsuspected strength which Hester's character was revealing.

"She is of the stuff martyrs are made of, this calm sister of mine," she said to herself; "there is rock and not sand here for life's experience to build upon. These men who choose me, how blind they are! But men always are weak and blind—that is understood."

About six o'clock, Denston, who had that day again remained at home, received a note to this effect:—

DEAR MR. DENSTON.—May I ask you to come over for a few minutes, if you are disengaged?—Yours sincerely, HESTER NORRIS.

This message was considered by the sisters better than a more definite one. They knew Denston was at home, because he had been seen at the window, and they took the opportunity afforded by their mother's temporary absence. She had gone out with Mr. Waterhouse and Kitty for a short stroll, persuaded to do so by the former, whose devotion now a-days was assiduous and apparently acceptable.

It was a matter of great satisfaction to the girls that their mother, during this time of sorrow and agitation, was unaware of the various external causes of uneasiness which had arisen, and they hoped to be able to act so that she might pass through it undisturbed.

When Denston arrived, he found Hester seated alone in the parlour awaiting him; the parlour which was now associated with two occasions, every feature of which was indelibly fixed on his brain. He did not show any sign of being agitated by the summons he had received. Hester also was quite mistress of herself. A very ordinary greeting, and a very ordinary introduction to conversation ensued on his entrance; but Hester soon opened up the real business of the interview.

"You will be wondering, Mr. Denston," she began, "why I have asked to see you. I hear from Mr. Waterhouse that there is some prospect of your going out to the Cape, and I wanted to tell you that in case of your doing so I should be very glad to stay with your sister. I thought it probable you might hesitate to leave her, if you did not know this."

Denston was very much taken aback by this speech. "He was a man who had a strong capacity for gratitude, but a correlative reluctance to place himself in a position calling for it, and when there was a great disability to express it. He paused for a moment, and then said in what might have seemed a cold tone—

"It is not yet certain that I go."

Hester was not aware of any coldness. She had always been accustomed to interpret this man's manner of speech by methods of her own—methods were they of intuition or illusion? Is it possible that what we are accustomed to consider such illusions may be after all intuitions, which by love's potent plumb-line sound depths where lie the undeveloped capabilities, the futile aspirations, the defeated aims which could not be guessed at in the individual as we know him?

"Oh, I trust you will," said Hester, in a tone of simple earnestness; "it is surely worth an effort."

Hester was feeling almost happy at this moment. For in Denston's presence, where she had dreaded to find herself, lest her pain should grow unbearable, she found a singular ease, and freedom from personal emotion, an unembarrassed calm. Love she felt indeed master of her soul, but it had suddenly become, as it were, winged within her, capable of bearing her on strong pinions high above selfish agitation. Without effort it had become possible for her to crave nothing beyond the power to give some boon of help or comfort, to smooth, if in any slight degree, the path before him. Hester marvelled at herself. She did not comprehend that this was a reward—that she was reaping the fruit of her previous struggle—that because she had never allowed herself to indulge in ignoble feelings, now in her moments of need the noble part of her which had never been crushed rose up to her aid. Denston, though Hester's heart was a sealed book to him, was strongly affected by a sense of the existence of a true kindness for him, which melted him in spite of himself.

"Do you think, then," he said, "that it very much matters whether one lives or dies?"

"Yes," replied Hester, looking at him gravely, with her whole soul in her eyes.

"Supposing one has no hope before one?"

"Hope," said Hester, to whom words suddenly came, "is not a gauge of what God intends to do for us."

Denston was silent.

"Do you think it is my duty to go?" he asked, by-and-by, abruptly.

"Once he told me my duty—why not I now?" thought Hester.

"Yes, I do," she said, with emphasis.

(To be continued.)

Sabbath School Work.

LESSON HELPS.

FOURTH QUARTER.

JESUS BEFORE PILATE.

LESSON II., October 10th, John xviii., 28-40; memorize verses 36-38.

GOLDEN TEXT.—I find in him no fault at all.—John xviii. 38.

TIME.—From five to six o'clock, Friday morning, April 7, A.D. 30.

PLACE.—Pilate's palace. Either in Herod's palace in north-west angle of Zion, or castle Antonia, north of the temple.

PARALLEL HISTORY.—Matt. xxvi. 57, to xxvii. 26; Mark xiv. 65, to xv. 15; Luke xxi. 63, to xxiii. 24.

ORDER OF EVENTS.—(1) Mockery by the servants; in the court of Caiaphas' palace, three to five o'clock Friday morning (Matt. xxvi. 57, 58; Mark xiv. 65; Luke xxi. 63-65). (2) The Sanhedrim re-assembled at daybreak to condemn Jesus: Council chamber, five o'clock (Matt. xxvii. 1), because their former meeting was irregular, and they could not pronounce sentence till daybreak. (3) Jesus sent to Pilate: Pilate's palace, five to five thirty a.m. (v. 28). (4) Pilate's interview with the Jews outside the palace (vs. 28-32). (5) *Eat the pasover*, the festive meals of the day. (6) Judge him according to your law; and of course inflict the punishment allowed.—excommunication, scourging, etc. (7) *The saying*: chap. xvii. 12. (8) *What death*: or what manner of death. The Roman mode of execution by crucifixion. (9) Pilate examines Jesus. Inside the palace, about 6 o'clock (see chap. xix. 14), vs. 33-38. (10) *Sayest thou of thyself*: if he made the charge, it would be that Jesus had set up a kingdom like Rome, and in rebellion against it. To this Jesus would answer no. If the Jews made the charge, it would be that he claimed to be the Messiah, who was really only a spiritual king. To this he would say yes, as he did. (11) *To this end*: to be a king. (12) Pilate's second conference with the Jewish leaders. Outside his palace (v. 38; Matt. xxvii. 12-14). (13) Pilate sends Jesus to Herod: Herod's palace early Friday morning (Luke xxiii. 5-12). Here Jesus was mocked again. (14) Pilate makes the Jews decide (vs. 39, 40; Matt. xxvii. 15-23). (15) *Barabbas*: a kind of a brigand, who had made an insurrection against the Roman power, and was hailed as a hero by the Jews.

SUBJECTS FOR SPECIAL REPORTS.—The order of events.—The time.—The hatred of the Jews, and its cause.—Jesus as king; the mockeries, and their cause.—Barabbas.—The choice between Christ and the world.

QUESTIONS.

INTRODUCTORY.—Give the leading events in the last lesson in their order. Have you read the parallel passages in other Gospels? Name time and place of this lesson.

SUBJECT. WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH JESUS THE CHRIST.

I. WHAT HIS ENEMIES WOULD DO (vs. 28-32).—After the first examination of Jesus before the Sanhedrim, what was done with him? (Matt. xxvi. 57, 58.) Why did they treat Jesus so? What is the evil of making sport of religious things? Where was Jesus next taken? (Matt. xxvii. 1.) Then where? (v. 28.) To be judged by whom? Where did his accusers stay? Why would not the priests enter the palace? Was this a strange freak of conscientiousness, considering what they were doing? Describe the interview with Pilate. Why would they not judge him? What scripture was fulfilled? (John xii. 32.) How? Are evil men in attacking the Gospel still compelled to aid it?

II. WHAT AN UNJUST JUDGE DID (vs. 33-38).—What was Pilate's next move? Where was Jesus? What did Pilate ask him? Why did Jesus reply as he did? What did Jesus say about his kingdom? Over whom is Jesus king? What was Pilate's report to the Jews outside? What did Pilate next do? (Luke xxiii. 5-12.) What was Herod's decision? (Luke xxiii. 15.) How was Jesus treated at Herod's palace? Why?

III. THE CHOICE OF THE PEOPLE (vs. 39, 40).—What demand did the people now make? (Mark xv. 8.) Who was Barabbas? How did Pilate attempt to escape a decision as to Jesus? Whom did the people choose? Why? What did Pilate then say? (Matt. xxvii. 22.) What choice like this must we all make? What will be the result of the choice? What was the result to the Jews of rejecting Jesus? (Matt. xxiii. 34-38).

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

I. A bad conscience is shown, by its fastidiousness as to ceremonies, but dullness as to wrongs.

II. The kindest men and causes are sometimes treated with contempt,—reforms, truths, rights.

III. They are ridiculed through misrepresentation, and misunderstanding of their nature and aims.

IV. Jesus Christ is not only your Saviour but your King.

V. Sincere seekers after truth will find Jesus Christ.

VI. To each one is presented the choice, {Christ or the world.

VII. To choose Christ is to choose righteousness, love, God, truth, happiness, heaven.

VIII. To choose the world is to choose pleasure, selfishness, sin, defeat, sorrow, eternal death.

REVIEW EXERCISE. (For the whole school in concert.)—6. What took place after the examination before Caiaphas and the leaders? *ANS.* Jesus was mocked and ridiculed. 7. What was done next? *ANS.* He was condemned to death by the Sanhedrim, early Friday morning. 8. Where was he then taken? *ANS.* To Pontius Pilate, the governor. 9. What did he do? *ANS.* He examined Jesus and found him innocent. 10. What choice did the people make? "Not this man but Barabbas."

THE AUTUMN SKY.

How bravely Autumn paints upon the sky The gorgeous fame of Summer which is fled! Hues of all flow'rs that in their ashes lie, Trophied in that fair light whereon they fed, Tulip, and hyacinth, and sweet rose red,— Like exhalations from the leafy mould!

Look here how honour glorifies the dead, And warms their scutcheons with a glance of gold.

—Hood. Written in a vol. of Shakespeare.