

Our Story.

BARBARA STREET.

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

CHAPTER XXII.—(Continued.)

AND after that terrible crash which had come into the midst of her mother's unsuspecting content, when, through her husband's carelessness and extravagance, ruin had fallen upon his own family, and many others, after the one awful night, the horrible incidents of which Grace only guessed at, when that idolised husband had attempted to take both her life and his own, and she had been forced to struggle against the dear hand, and at last, when she could struggle no longer, and all her efforts at soothing failed, to call others to her help: and then, when, after his wife was compelled at last to consent to be separated from him, and he was removed by the doctors to an asylum, he had lapsed into a state of hopeless gloom and apathy, from which for fourteen years her visits had never roused him, except to a kind of passive aversion, nor ever drawn from him a look or word of responsive affection—after all this, what miraculous spring did the love flow from, which could live still in unwavering intensity and unabated tenderness? Still, her mother loved with the fervour of the lover, and the constancy of the wife. After the separation—that she might not hear her husband's name on lips which would condemn and reproach—she had buried herself with her children in that unknown dreary London, which knew no more of her than she of it.

The worst feature of her husband's case had been that, knowing ruin to be all but inevitable, he had in his desperation, tried to retrieve his position by getting in loans on every hand; and it had only been in consideration of the effect which the final calamity produced on the bankrupt that his creditors had refrained from insisting upon his prosecution. But the noise of the disgraceful failure and the ruin it had spread had gone over all the country, and therefore Mrs. Fleetwood dropped the name which was in everybody's mouth, and took instead her husband's Christian name, that she might still bear a name that was his. And the younger children, as we know had never been taken into the mother's confidence. They believed their father dead, and their mother would not have it otherwise. As she had kept the secret, so she would still, with a blind tenacity that would not reason. She clung to the one idea that she would keep the sad story from every ear—above all, his children must never know it. And Grace, who represented the principle of sacrificing every consideration to her father, who strenuously disapproved of the concealment from her sisters, and felt her mother's persistency in visiting the asylum grievously mistaken, and who, to make her objections the more potent, was possessed of an uncommonly strong will, which she was in the habit of exercising as successfully in respect of her mother as of any other person, yet exerted little effort to enforce her will in these directions. The fact was, her will was relaxed by the influence of that same awe of which I have spoken. The love which she saw in her mother was a thing so wonderful, inexplicable, and almost fearful, that she dared not meddle with it. A strong man is mastered by the tiny hand of a child, which has a force in it subtle and immeasurable. And Grace was mastered by this passion of her mother's, which was half weakness, half force, and the stronger for the union.

The institution in which Mrs. Norris had placed her husband, and in which he had remained during the whole period of their separation, was situated in a southern suburb of London. It was a handsome building, standing in extensive grounds, and the inmates were surrounded with luxury. The heavy fees bore a large proportion to her income, and left her and her children much straitened, but that had never been thought of as a sacrifice. Grace and her mother were informed by the matron that Mr. Fleetwood was in the garden, and she offered to take them to him. She chatted cheerfully while she walked with them, in the way people have with whom familiarity with painful matters has bred indifference if not contempt. She was used to receiving visitors who, like this tall and dignified looking person, dressed shabbily though carefully, showed pale cheeks, and bore a fast-throbbing heart.

"Do you consider Mr. Fleetwood better?" asked Mrs. Norris, tremblingly.

"Not much as to his spirits, I think, but he is perfectly quiet; he goes about wherever he likes by himself, and interferes with no one. Dr. Poynter was saying only yesterday that he considered Mr. Fleetwood's mind was becoming more rational while his strength was declining."

"But his health is good, is it not? There is nothing the matter?"

Grace looked at her mother anxiously, for her pallor had become excessive.

"No," said the matron, in a doubtful tone; "there is nothing the matter, I believe, but Mr. Fleetwood is not the man he was. He is getting older, you see."

"I suppose I can see Dr. Poynter before I leave?"

"Certainly; he is always in his room at this time in the morning. I will leave you now, for there is Mr. Fleetwood sitting under the tree. He always goes to that seat when he is left alone. Sometimes he will sit there for hours together, without seeming to take notice of anything unless he is roused."

The matron turned back to the house.

"Stay here, Grace," said her mother. "I am going to see if I cannot surprise him into speaking to me. I shall go up to him just as I used to do."

Grace, under that influence which she could not resist, never interfered with what her mother chose to do here.

Her father did not raise his head as his wife approached him.

Grace, standing where she was left, watched her mother as she crossed the grass towards the cedar, in the shade of which her father was sitting, and sit down silently very close to his side. He stirred restlessly, and moved his head from side to side; but still he did not raise his eyes. His hands were clasped between his knees. She put her hand—a soft, unglowed hand—upon them, and said, tremulously—

"Your hands are cold, Norris; it is cold to-day in the shade."

The attitude at matter-of-fact succeeded only in achieving pathos, for the tone was more eloquent than the words. Her husband turned his face towards her, with a hurried eager movement.

"Oh, Grace!" he said. A glimmer of recognition, the ghost of a smile passed over the vacant face. He had spoken only two words, but they were words of response, of greeting. Across a gulf of fourteen years his love had leaped to meet his wife's once more. Grace caught her breath sharply—what was going to happen.

"Oh, Norris," cried her mother, clinging to his arm, "Norris, it is I; yes, it is Grace. You are glad to see me! Tell me you are glad to see me, Norris!"

The unlooked for success had swept away the poor fabric of diplomacy. The passion of her voice and tone seemed to scare away the spirit which she had coaxed for a moment to return. Her pleading fell once more on callous ears, and the arm to which she clung remained rigid and unresponsive. With the quick instinct of love she saw the mistake, and compelled her trembling voice to return to its first tone.

"Shall we walk about a little, Norris? It is cold sitting still. Put your hand through my arm."

He turned on her a curious look of distrust and suspicion.

"I must go back to the house for a short time," he said, "if you will excuse me. I think I heard some one calling. But there is no need for you to come. I can walk myself. Who is that lady on the grass? Your friend, I suppose. Pray excuse me."

His wife made no effort to detain him.

"Good-bye, my dear," she said, "I shall soon come again to see you."

She held his hand for a moment, and kissed him gently and without agitation, looking into his eyes with a smile of loving radiance beautiful to see. He turned away, raising his hat, and Grace, with a swelling heart, saw her mother's look as it remained fixed on him, slowly pass from radiance to a piteous distress—the tender smile leave the quivering lips, and the eyes fill with slow painful tears. Then Grace went to her, and Mrs. Norris burst into uncontrollable weeping.

"Oh, Grace," she cried, "he is better. He called me by my name. You heard him? Did you see that for a moment he loved me? He is better; I am sure he is better."

"Grace did not contradict her mother; she remained silent, and, when Mrs. Norris grew composed, they went back to the house, but her father they saw no more."

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHAT OCCURRED AT THE EARLY MARKETING.

IT WAS about this time that in Philip Denston's mind a course of action which had at first presented itself as an idea assumed the appearance of a positive duty. After the communication he had made to his sister he looked for an abatement in the number of Hester's visits, but he looked in vain. He watched the two together once or twice, and could perceive neither a change in his sister's manner, nor a reflection of it in the girl, who was, he was assured, sensitive enough both to feel and to betray that she felt any difference in the relationship. One day he spoke to his sister.

"I see you have that girl over here still," he said; "it surprises me."

"Why?" asked Miss Denston, coolly. "I am not apprehensive about you, after your assurance the other evening. Besides, you come scarcely at all into contact with each other."

Denston shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"I thought that absurdly was done with," he said. "My idea was that it was hardly fitting to be making a friend of the daughter of a man whose memory you loathe, and receiving so much attention from her. It offends some sense or other in me."

"Have you not also received services from his wife, and are you not intimate with the whole family?"

"True, but there is this difference—I never condemned Fleetwood as unparagonably as you did, nor indulged myself in hating him. Your way of regarding the calamity as a matter of personal resentment did not commend itself to me. The man doubtless had his struggles and his temptations, like the rest of us. Why abuse him? Rebel against the Divine decrees if you will, but be merciful to the feeble wretch who was used to enforce them."

"You are irreverent, Philip," said his sister. "I have never rebelled against Divine decrees, and trust I never shall. But, as you know, the failure of the bank was entirely owing to the bad conduct of the proprietor—it is he who has been the cause of all our misfortunes. The man is dead; and can make us no direct reparation, but it has been ordained that his daughter shall make to me some amends. It is to me a most impressive discovery, illustrating as it does the wonderful secret workings of Providence."

Denston was dismayed. It seemed that he had completely defeated his own ends, and succeeded only in riveting Hester's chains more firmly, by taking from his sister's mind every sense of obligation towards the girl, and causing her to feel that for Hester to give and her to receive was only a just reprisal for her father's misdeeds. He bit his lip and said no more—further speech was useless. It served him right, he said to himself in his mortification, for meddling between women, a thing he had never done before, and would take care never to do again. But even as he said so his mind was at work revolving further methods of pursuing the very course he pronounced abjured. The fact was now that he had by injudicious action brought Hester into a worse position than before, common chivalry caused him to feel more than before bound to extricate her, if it were possible.

And now recurred to his mind an idea that had previously struck him. It was improbable that Hester's family were aware of her position. They did not know his sister's character, nor the nature of her claims upon Hester. Would it be injudicious to make an appeal to them on her behalf? Nay, how could it be injudicious to appeal to a girl's own female relatives—people of good sense, to whom her interests were as their own? These questions being decided in favour of the scheme, it might appear natural that Hester's mother was the person to whom to apply. What process of reasoning brought Denston to the conclusion that Grace was the proper person? Grace's personality being very strong, it was not perhaps to be wondered at that she should occur first to the mind, and then inclination is a powerful, even when latent, factor in the reasoning of the most logical of individuals. An unfortunate man like Denston counts pleasures which like a man accustomed to prosperity would reckon pains.

My readers will perhaps have surmised what certainly not one of his associates has had the faintest suspicion of—that Denston's ready denial of feel-

ing in the case of Hester would not have been so easily given had Grace been the subject of his sister's anxiety. Denston possessed almost unlimited powers of self-restraint. He cared nothing for the opinion of others concerning him, but, to balance that, he cared a great deal for his own. He had always been a law to himself, had resisted temptations, and practised virtues upon that basis, and had become somewhat of a Pharisee in consequence. During his illness, in which the mysteries of life and death had shown themselves under a new and more solemn aspect, that groundwork had been severely shaken, and something of higher, because lower, motives had sprung into being. He now conceived himself to be more faulty and others less so, and the mellowing influence of that new disposition of mind was bringing a gentler tone to his voice, and softening the severity of his features. For this hardness his original nature was not altogether to be blamed: the circumstances of his life had, since attaining manhood, been so unmitigatedly ungenial as to serve as an excuse for some resulting bitterness in the opinion of any but such as are themselves hard. But though his character was to some extent undergoing modification, its main features would of course remain, and the power of self-restraint among them. And therefore, feeling confident that he would betray nothing which did not lie in his scheme of action to betray, he now made up his mind to allow himself the indulgence of intercourse with the woman whom he had hitherto constrained himself to avoid. It was perhaps only another development of his sister's feeling which induced him to come to this resolution, in consequence of the discovery he had made of Grace's parentage—only it differed in the important respect that in his case the reparation he proposed was one that left the unconscious agent none the worse off. To slacken a little the reserve he had hitherto maintained in the presence of the woman whom he loved, but to whom he knew he should never speak of love, with a pungent sauce consisting of the hidden knowledge that to her father he owed the misfortunes of his whole career, was a pleasure which some men might have considered more akin to torture.

Having made up his mind to consult Grace about her sister, how could he best approach her on the subject? It was a matter of difficulty to get speech with her alone, in any natural way and he must both see her alone and do it in a natural informal manner. The only possible occasion seemed to be when she did her early marketing. It was a regular thing for her to go out alone after breakfast for this purpose. He must watch her movements, and follow her. A most unattractive and inconvenient time it would be for an important discussion, but needs must avail himself of the opportunity. The next morning, accordingly, after observing Grace's exit, he went out himself—his sister being still in her room—and came up with her at the turning into the Chester Road. But he did not immediately accost her. His cold firmly-composed features did not soften and glow as those of Waterhouse would have done under similar circumstances; nevertheless, it was a piquant pleasure to him to follow Grace unseen, to be the observer of her curious rapid bird-like movements, of the decision with which she turned from one shop-front, or the earnestness with which she studied the wares in another. By-and-by she stopped at the greengrocer's, and, turning round, caught sight of Denston. He joined her, shook hands, and then her attention was taken away from him, and bestowed upon the vegetables and fruit, which demanded it all. She had a basket in her hand, which was rapidly filled—it must be understood that in London to procure such produce cheaply, and to advantage, it is necessary to buy at the shop, and to bring it home one's self. Denston gravely took the basket as they turned away.

"Oh! are you going my way?" asked Grace. "Don't you mind carrying the basket? What a pleasure it is to buy these early peas!"

"They are very dear, aren't they?"

"Oh! I should not like to eat them; I should feel it a positive sin. But as Mr. Waterhouse has no conscience at all on such matters, I get the pleasure of buying them. I was a stranger to such sensations till he came to overturn all my notions of economy. It quite frightened me at first, but I find one soon gets used to spending money."

"It seems that to be rich has, after all, some advantages in your eyes—one can, at any rate, buy early peas."

"Yes, of course, and many things besides. You have not heard the news yet. What do you think Mr. Waterhouse has done? He is paying for Charlie to go to a convalescent home at Brighton, and we sent him off yesterday with such jubilation, and an outfit of nice clothes provided by Lothair!"

"Lothair?"

Grace laughed and blushed.

"See the danger of giving way to a bad habit! I will positively never use a nickname again."

"You will probably be withdrawing your ultimatum on the subject of rich men."

"My ultimatum? What was that?"

"That you disapproved of the species."

"I don't think I ever said that."

"Pardon me, yes, the first time I ever saw you."

Mr. Denston spoke earnestly, and the thought flashed through Grace's mind—"After all, my surmises as to his feelings towards Hester are probably as unfounded as mother considers them, for here he is quite complimentary to me this morning, with his recollections of my first speech!"

"Oh," she said, lightly, "if I said that, perhaps I have altered my mind. I am often guilty of that weakness."

"That is generally considered to be a feminine prerogative, isn't it?"

"Isn't that rather commonplace cynicism?"

"Truths are generally commonplace."

"This rudeness," thought Grace, "is more like himself, and is preferable to the other style. A man should always keep in character—it is so upsetting to the equilibrium of things otherwise."

"But," continued Denston, "you will be turning home directly, and I have not yet spoken to you on a subject which is important enough to have brought me out now on purpose to discuss with you."

"Indeed," said Grace, whom the gravity of the tone had instantly sobered. But here is the greengrocer, and I must go in."

"It is about your sister Hester."

(To be continued.)

"It is so uncommon experience," said Dr. Hall, "for me to receive a letter from a hired servant, regretting that she would be unable to come the next Sunday, as it was her day to stay at home, and enclosing perhaps five, and in one case, ten dollars for the foreign missionary collection."

Sabbath School Work.

LESSON HELPS.

THIRD QUARTER.

THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS.

LESSON IV., July 25th, John xi. 20-27, 39-44; memorize verses 23-26.

GOLDEN TEXT—Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life.—John xi. 25.

NOTE.—This lesson, as selected by the International Committee, was so long (vs. 17-44) that the leading publishing houses agreed on the above shorter selection. The same is true of Lesson 12.

TIME.—January to February, A.D. 30., immediately following the last lesson.

PLACE.—Bethany, on the Mount of Olives, about two miles south-east of Jerusalem.

INTRODUCTION.—In our last lesson we left Lazarus dead at Bethany, and Jesus remaining two days still in Perea, and then journeying with his disciples towards Bethany. When he arrived, he found that Lazarus had been dead and buried four days, the burial, according to Jewish custom, taking place on the same day on which he died. He was buried in a cave, or a recess hollowed out of the perpendicular side of a rock. It was probably a private tomb in a garden. The sisters were at the house mourning with friends.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.—20. Martha met Jesus: just outside of the village, v. 30. Jesus did not go to the house, (1) because he would see and instruct the sisters alone. (2) The Jews there might report him to the Pharisees and hinder his plans. But Mary sat still: or still sat. Being more retired, she did not hear of Jesus' arrival as soon as Martha, who would be busy with the household, and first see the messenger (see Luke x. 38-42). 25. I am the resurrection: all the dead shall rise through my power, therefore I can raise to life as easily now as on that great day. 26. Shall never die: there will be no end to his existence. Physical death will be but a change: a doorway to a higher life. 27. Thou art the Christ: and therefore what you say must be true, though I cannot quite understand it. 39. Take away the stone: that was rolled against the entrance of the tomb. 41. Thou hast heard me: Jesus, as the Messiah, kept up continual communication with his father in heaven. 44. Bound hand and foot: either the limbs separately, or his whole body was wound loosely in cloths. The coming forth may have required little more than sitting up and appearing at the entrance of the tomb.

SUBJECTS FOR SPECIAL REPORTS.—The family at Bethany.—Rock tombs.—Jesus the resurrection and the life.—Comfort and help in the doctrine of the resurrection.—Why Jesus prayed.—Grave-clothes.—This miracle a parable of redemption.

QUESTIONS.

INTRODUCTORY.—Where was Jesus in our last lesson? Where was he going? What for? How long after Lazarus' death did Jesus reach Bethany? (v. 39.)

SUBJECT: JESUS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

I. JESUS TEACHING THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION (vs. 20-27).—Where did Martha meet Jesus? (v. 30.) What was her greeting? How did she know that her brother would not have died had Jesus been there? What shows that she still hoped for some help from Jesus? Had Jesus raised any from the dead before this? (Luke vii. 11-17, viii. 49-56.)

What was Jesus' reply? (v. 23.) What did Martha take this to mean? (v. 24.) What great doctrine did Jesus then teach her? What is the resurrection? Who only are to have this resurrection to life? What does Jesus mean by saying that he is the resurrection? How can Christians be said never to die? How did Martha give her assent to this teaching? (v. 27.) How was her faith in Jesus as the Messiah an assurance that she believed what Jesus had been teaching?

Why did not Jesus come to Martha's house? How did Martha learn of Jesus' approach before Mary? How does the conduct of the sisters agree with what we have known of them before? (Luke x. 38-42.) Were Martha's regrets (v. 21) wise? What change is made in us by the resurrection? What comfort do you derive from this great truth for yourself? for your friends? Was the resurrection of Lazarus an example of our resurrection?

II. JESUS AT THE GRAVE OF LAZARUS (vs. 28-38). What message did Martha take to her sister? Does the Master call for us? In what ways? To what does he call us? Which is the shortest verse in the Bible? Why did Jesus weep? Give another instance of his weeping. (Luke xix. 41-43.) What does this show as to his tenderness and sympathy?

III. JESUS GIVES A PROOF OF HIS POWER TO RAISE THE DEAD. (vs. 39-44).—What did Jesus say at the grave? (v. 41.) Did Jesus need to pray in order to do his wonderful work? Why did he wish to let the people know that he had communication with his father? What did he say to Lazarus? With what result? How was Lazarus bound? How does this show that Jesus has power to raise the dead at the last day?

Why did Jesus lift up his eyes when he prayed? Were Jesus' miracles performed at a great cost to him in mental and spiritual strain? (vs. 33, 38; Mark ix. 29.) Was it a privilege to Lazarus to be brought to life again? Show how this raising of Lazarus is a parable of conversion from the death of sin to the new life.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

I. The resurrection is the proof of immortal life. II. We are the same persons after the resurrection, but changed as a seed into a flower.

III. Only as we believe in Jesus and receive his life, can we have part in this resurrection of the life.

IV. The Master is come and calleth for us, by his Word, his Providence, his dying love, his Holy Spirit, by Christian influences, through friends; by our consciences, by a sense of gratitude.

V. He calls us to God, to heaven, to a holy life, to usefulness, to joy, to every good.

VI. A parable of redemption: (1) men are dead in sin; (2) they cannot save themselves; (3) the only hope is in Jesus; (4) We should go to Jesus for our friends; (5) Jesus grieves over sinners; (6) To those who believe he gives a new life; (7) at first the new convert is hampered by the grave-clothes of old habits, prejudices, ignorance. "Loose him and let him go!"