

WHICH SHALL IT BE?

Which shall it be? Which shall it be?
God, or the devil, bond or free?
Will you boldly and cheerily take your
stand
With the chosen few, with the noble
band,
Who are steadfastly doing all they can
For God, and the right, and fallen man?
Or will you sink, debased and blind,
To bend with the ruck of human kind,
God, or the devil, bond or free?
Which shall it be, lady? which shall it
be?
Which shall it be? The home life
sweet,
Gay with the patter of tiny feet;
Or the squalid taproom, grimy and
grim,
The drunkard's curse, or the children's
hymn?
Wrecked lives, or the strength that never
flags,
Peace and plenty, or ruin and rage?
Bible or sheep-skin, bond or free?
Which shall it be, lady? which shall it
be?
Which shall it be? Two paths lie there:
The right leads upwards, the left, all
where?
Others may give you counsel true,
But the choice, dear lady, is for you,
And remember now, in your boyhood's
prime,
Is the turning point and the seeding
time:
The sowing of the seed, or the saint's bent
knee—
Which shall it be, lady? which shall it
be? —Selected.

Selected Serial.

THE SQUIRE OF SANDAL-SIDE.

BY MRS. AMELIA E. BAKER.

CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

The first movement of the Julius Sandals in Sand-Side had been a clever one. "I want you to let us have the east rooms, dear mother," said Sophia, on their arrival. "Julius does feel the need of the morning sun, and the light, and though other rooms had been prepared, the request was readily granted, and without any suspicion of the motive which had dictated it. And yet they had made a very prudent calculation. Occupying the best rooms gave them a certain prominence and standing in the house, for only guests of importance were assigned to them; and the servants, who are people of wise perceptions generally, took their tone from the circumstances. It appeared as if a spirit of dissatisfaction and quarreling came with them. The maids all found out that their work was too heavy, and that they were worn out with it. Sophia had been playing them, Mrs. Sandal does not mean to be hard, but she is so wrapped up in the Squire she is nothing, and Miss Charlotte is so strong herself, she could expect too much from others. She does not intend to be exacting, but then she can't help it.

And sitting up a bit of hot supper. The chamber maid repeated the remark, and the housemaid said she only knew that she was tired of her feet, and hadn't been near hand her own folks for a fortnight, and the cook thought Miss had got quite natty. She had been near falling out with her mother once, and all the while she was because she was fagged out, all day long and every day, making some kind of little kitchen or other that was necessary.

Not one remembered that the Julius Sandals had themselves considerably increased the work of the house, and that Mrs. Julius alone could find quite sufficient employment for one who, since her arrival, Charlotte's room had been somewhat neglected for the firelight chambers, but it was Charlotte's all the blame of overwork and weariness was laid. Indecently the thought had, she began to feel that there was some reason or other she was out of favor; that her few wants were carelessly attended to, and that Mrs. Julius influenced the house as completely as she had when she was Miss Sandal. She soon discovered also, that repining was useless. Her mother begged for peace at any cost. "Put up with it," she said, for a little while, Charlotte. "You can't bear quarreling. And you know Sophia will insist upon expiating. She will call up the servants and find and prove such make complaints and regrets, and in the long end have all on her own side. And can't you tell that Ann has been queer lately, and Elizabeth talks of leaving at Martins, Oh, Charlotte, put up with things, my dear. There is only you to help me."

Charlotte could not resist such appeals. She knew she was really the hand in which all other hands in the house looked the heart on which her father and mother leaned their weary heads; still, she could not but resent many an unkind position which Sophia's clever tactics compelled her to take. For instance, as she was leaving the room one morning, Sophia said, in her blandest voice, "Dear Charlotte, will you tell Ann to make one of those quon quon puddings, for Julius. He does enjoy them so much."

Ann did not receive the order pleasantly. They are a sight of trouble, Miss Charlotte. I'll be hard set with the Squire's fancies today. And there is as good as three dinners to make now, and I must say a quon quon pudding is a bit thoughtless of you. And Charlotte felt the injustice she was too proud to explain to a servant. But even to Sophia complaint availed nothing. "You must give extra orders yourself to Ann in the future," she said. "Ann accuses me of being thoughtless in consequence of them."

Does any one imagine that such trials as these are small and insignificant? They are the very ones that make the heart burn, and the teeth close on the lips, and the eyes fill with angry tears. They take hold of our daily work, and smother out of our life and life force as nothing else can slay it. There was an evil spirit in the house—a small, selfish, envious, malicious spirit; people were cruel, and they knew not why; the days were harder than those dreadful ones when fire and candle were never out, and every one was a watcher in the shadow of death.

As the season advanced, Julius took precisely the position which Stephen had foretold he would take. At first he deferred entirely to the Squire; he received his orders, and then saw them carried out. Very soon he forgot to name the Squire in the matter. He held consultations with the head man, and talked with him about the morning and harvesting, and the sale of lambs and fleeces. The master's room was opened, and Julius sat at the table to receive tenants and laborers. In the Squire's chair it was easy to feel that he was himself Squire of Sandal-Side and Torver.

It was a most unhappy summer. Evil, like weeds, grow apace. There was scarcely any interval between some long-honored custom and its disappearance. To-day it was observed as it had been, to-morrow the next week it had passed away, and appeared to be forgotten. "Such times I never saw," said Ann. "I have been at Sandal twenty-two years come Martins, but I'm going to be never more."

"You'll not do it, Ann. It's but talk."

"Nay, but I'm on it. I have taken the fastening penny, and I'm bound to make that good. Things are that trying here now that I can't abide them longer."

All summer servants were going and coming at Sand-Side; the very foundations of its domestic life were broken up, and Charlotte's bright face had a constant wrinkle of worry and annoyance. Sophia was careful to point out the dirt. She had the housekeeping ability. Everything is in a mess. If only I could take hold of things. But Charlotte is such a spirit, one does not like to offer help. I would be only to goad to put things right, but I should give offense. The head man, the master of the house, the Squire, and a very little of his can paralyze and irritate a whole household.

Moving time and shearing time and rising time came and went, but the gay pastoral festivals brought none of their time pleasures. The music in the fields did not like Julius in the Squire's place, and they took no pains to hide the fact. Then he came home with complaints. "They were idle. They were disrespectful. The organ had fallen short. He could not understand it, and when he had expressed some dissatisfaction on the matter, the head man had told him to take his grumbling to God Almighty. "An insolent race, these stavesmen and dale shepherds," he added. "If I could get them to do any, he thinks himself as good as he owns it."

All well-born men, Julius, all of them, are they not, Charlotte? Eh? What?

"Well, then," answered Charlotte, warmly, "that King James the First set up a claim to all these small estates, on the plea that their owners had never served a feudal lord, and were, therefore, tenants of the crown. But the large statesmen, who were with the king, they told them in a body to hang him. Between Kendal and Staveley, and there over two thousand men swore that as they had their lands by the sword, they would keep them by the same. So you see, Julius, the more gentlemen before the feudal system existed, they never put a finger under its authority, and they have long survived its fall."

Well, for all that they make poor servants.

"There's men that want Indian boys to negro slaves to do their dirty work. I am free men at Sandal-Side as long as I am Squire of that name."

They missed you sorely in the fields, father. It was a shearing time, not a hay time, nor a harvest time, to any one in Sandal this year. But you will stay in your meadows again—did I grant it—next summer. And then how they will work! And what shouting there will be at sight of you! And what a harvest home we shall have!

And he caught her enthusiasm, and stood up to try his feet, and felt sure that he walked stronger, and would soon be downstairs once more. And Julius, whose eyes were not blind, felt a little of the scornful smile which could not be such evident decay and dissolution, is really criminal," he said to Sophia, "to encourage hopes so palpably false. For Julius, like all selfish persons, could perceive only one side of a question—the side that touches his own pocket. He never entered his mind that the Squire was trying to cheer and encourage his wife and daughter, and was privately quite aware of his own condition. Sandal had been told him that he had received the tokens of the secure message which every soul receives when the King desires his presence. He had never heard these solemn conversations which followed the reading of "The Evening Service," which he and his two talked with Death with a companion. So, though Julius meddled much with Sandal affairs, there was a life there into which he never entered.

One evening, however, Charlotte was walking with Stephen. They had been to look at the new building, for every sign of progress was a matter of interest to them. As they came through the village they perceived that Farmer Hunt was looking at his home into his orchard a great bowl of apple seed, and was followed by a merry company, singing wassail as they poured a little at the root of every tree.

And when he suddenly raised his head, and saw her look of amazement, he made a little bravado of the affair, and said, with an air of frankness, "It is a letter from Harry. I thought it best for his letters, and I took them to the house. The mail-bag might be taken to the Squire's room, and who knows what would happen if he should see one of these?" and he tapped the letter significantly with his long, pointed forefinger.

You should not have made such an arrangement as that, Julius, without speaking to mother. It was cruel to Harry. Why should the villagers think that the sight of a letter from him would be so deadly to his own people?"

"I did it for the best, Charlotte. Of course, you will misjudge me."

"Ah! I know now why Poly Bathwaite called you 'such a nice, kind, thoughtful gentleman as never was.' Is the letter for you?"

"Mr. Lattig can examine the address if you wish."

"Mr. Lattig distinctly refuses to look at the letter. Come, Charlotte, the air is cold and raw; and with very scant courtesy they parted."

"What can it mean, Steve, Julius and Harry in correspondence? I don't know what to think of such a thing. Harry has only written once to me since he went away. There is something wrong in all this secrecy, you may depend upon it."

"I would not be suspicious, Charlotte. Harry is affectionate and trusting. Julius has written him letters full of sympathy and friendship; and the poor fellow, cut off from home and kindred, has been only too glad to answer. Perhaps we should have written and told him so."

"But why did Julius take that trouble? Julius always has a motive for what he does. I mean a selfish motive. Has Harry written to you?"

"Only a few lines the very day he left. I have heard nothing since."

The circumstance troubled Charlotte far beyond its apparent importance. She could conceive of no possible reason for Julius interfering in Harry's life, and she had the feeling of a person facing a danger in the dark. Julius was also annoyed at her discovery. "It precipitates matters," he said to Sophia, "and is apparently an unlucky chance. But chance is destiny, and this last letter of Harry's indicates that all things are very nearly ready for me. As for your sister, Charlotte, I think she is the most interesting person I ever knew."

The air of the supper-table was one of reserve and offense. Only Sophia twitted and observed and wondered about all kinds of trivial things. "Mother has so many headaches now. Does she take proper care to take exercise. Julius and I never neglect taking exercise. We think it a duty. No time, do you say? We ought to take time. Poor, dear father was never unreasonable; he would wish mother to take time. What taste, Charlotte, Charlotte! I don't think Ann cares how she cooks now. When I was at home, and the eldest daughter, she always liked to have things nice. Julius, my dear one, can you find any fault with my cooking? And on and on, until Charlotte felt as if she must scream or throw a plate down, or fly beyond the sight and sound of all things human.

The next evening Julius announced his intention of going abroad at once. But I shall leave Sophia to be a little soiled for mother's feelings. What taste, an hour beyond the time necessary for travel and business. He spoke with an air of conscious self-denial; and as Charlotte did not express any gratitude, he continued, "Not that I expect any thanks, Sophia, but I am fortunate we find duty is its own reward."

"Are you going to see Harry?"

"I may do such a thing."

"Is he sick?"

"No."

"He will not get sick while you are there." And then some passionate impulse took possession of her; her face glowed like a flame, and her eyes glittered like sparks. "If anything happens Harry while you are with him, I swear, Sophia, I will hold Sandal, if ever lived, that you shall account for it!"

"Oh, you know, Sophia dear, this is too much! Leave the table, my love. Your sister must be—" and he tapped his forehead, while Sophia, with a look of annihilating scorn, drew her drapery tight around her and withdrew.

"What did I say? What do I think? What terror is in my heart? Oh, Harry, Harry, Harry!"

She buried her face in her hands, and sat in a wooden chair. Sat so long that Phoebe, the table maid, came to lay to be unkind and aggravating; especially when one of the chambermaids came down for supper, and informed the rulers of the servants' hall that Phoebe, the table maid, had told about Miss Charlotte falling out with her husband."

"Mercy on us! What doings we have to hide with!" And Ann shook her check apron, and sat down with an air of nervous exhaustion and patience.

"You can't think what a taking Mr. Julius is in. He's going away to-morrow."

"For good and all?"

"Not he. He'll be back again. He has had a falling out with Miss Charlotte."

"Poor lass! Say what you will, she has been hard set lately. I never knew nor heard tell of her being flighty and frantically before the Squire's trouble."

"The Squire's trouble? What do you mean, Ann Skelton. Miss Charlotte is just all the last few weeks, she is that off-and-on and changeable-like and spirit. Mrs. Julius says she does beat all."

"I don't pin my faith on what Mrs. Julius says. Not I."

In the east rooms the criticism was still more severe. Julius railed for an hour he finally decided that he never saw a more suspicious, unkindly, uncharitable, unchristianlike girl than Charlotte Sandal. "I am glad to get away from her a little while," he cried. "How can she be your sister, Sophia?"

So glad was he to get away that he left before Charlotte came down in the morning. Ann made him a cup of coffee, and received a little of some suave words, and was quite sure after them that "Mr. Julius was the finest gentleman that ever trod in shoe leather."

Ann Julius was not above being gratified with the appreciation and good wishes of servants; and it gave him pleasure to leave in the little burrah of their bows and courtesies, their smiles and their good wishes.

He went without delay straight to the small Italian village in which Harry had made his home. Harry's letters had prepared him for trouble and poverty, but he had little idea of the real condition of the heir of Sandal-Side. A few bare rooms in some dilapidated palace, grim with faded magnificence, and less and dull, was the kind of place he expected. He found him in a small cottage surrounded by a barren, sandy patch of ground overgrown with neglected vines and vagabond weeds. The interior was a room of consumption, a woman in the firm grip of consumption was lying; an emaciated, feverish woman, fretful with acute suffering. A little child, wan and waxy-looking, and apparently as ill as its mother, wailed in a cot by her side. Signor Lanza was sinking under the weight of the neglected acre which had been a vineyard or garden. Harry had gone into the village for some necessity; and when he returned Julius felt a shock and a pang of regret for the dashing young soldier squire that he had known as Harry Sandal.

He kissed his wife with passionate love and sorrow, and then turned to Julius with that mute look of inquiry which few find themselves able to resist.

"He is alive yet—much better, he says; and Charlotte thinks he may be in the fields again next season."

"Thank God! My poor Beatrice and her baby! You see what is coming to them."

"And I am so poor I cannot get her the change of air, the luxuries, the medicines, which would at least prolong life and make death easy."

"To back with me to Sandal-Side, and see the Squire; he may listen to you now."

"Never more! It was cruel of father to take my marriage in such a way. He turned my life's joy into a crime, costing every hour that was left me."

"People used to be so intense—a few strong feelings," as Mr. Wordsworth says—"to strong for ordinary life. We really can't afford to love and hate and suffer in such a tectonic way now; but the Squire came from the Middle Ages. This is a dreadful just place, Harry."

"Yes, it is. We were dreadfully deceived in it. I bought it, and we dreamed of vineyards and milk and wine, and a long, happy, simple life together. Nothing has prospered with us. We were swindled in the house and land. The Signor knows nothing about vines. He was brought to take about, and he spoke he laughed hysterically, and took Julius into an inner room. 'I don't want Beatrice to hear that I am out of money. She does not know that I am destitute. The sorrow, at least, I have kept from her.'

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"You said he was getting better. For God's sake, do not speak of his death."

"I am supposing a case. You would then be Squire of Sandal-Side. Would you return there with Beatrice?"

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"Mother would have to take my place, or Charlotte. I have thought of that. I could not bear to sit in father's chair, and go up and down the house. I should see him always. I should hear continually his little cry with which he fell ill, even here, all the spaces of my memory and my dreams. I cannot go back to Sandal-Side. Nothing could take me back, not even my mother."

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"No, no; there is my son Michael."

Julius was stunned for a moment. "Oh, yes! The child is a boy, then?"

"It is a boy. What were you going to say?"

"I was going to ask you to sell your rights in the house for ten thousand pounds. It would be better for you to have a sum like that in your hand at once than to trust to dribbling remittances sent now and then by women in charge. You could invest that sum to noble purpose in America, become a citizen of the country, and found an American line, as my father has founded an Indian one."

"The poor little chap makes no difference. He is only born to die. And I think your offer is a good one. I am so worn out, and things are really desperate with me. I never can look back to England. I am sick to death of Florence. There are places where Beatrice might even yet recover. Yes, for her sake, I will sell you my inheritance. Can I have the money soon?"

"This house I had the proper paper drawn up before I came here. Read it over carefully. See if you think it fair and honorable. If you do, sign your name; and I will give you a check you can cash here in Florence. Then it will be your own fault if Beatrice wants to change of air, luxuries, and medicine."

He laid the paper on the table, and Harry sat down and pretended to read it. But he did not understand anything of the jargon. The words danced up and down. He could only see "Beatrice," "freedom from care," "power to get away from Florence," and the final thought, the one which removed his last scruple, "Lanza can have the cottage, and I shall be clear of him forever."

Without a word he went for a pen and ink, and wrote his name boldly to the deed of relinquishment. Then Julius handed him a check for ten thousand pounds, and went with him to the bank in order to facilitate the transfer of the sum. Harry's credit. On the street, in the hot sunshine, they stood a few minutes.

"You are quite satisfied, Harry?"

"You have saved me from despair. Perhaps you have saved Beatrice. I am grateful to you."

"Have I done justly and honorably by you?"

"I believe you have."

"Then good-by. I must hasten home. Sophia will be anxious, and one never knows what may happen."

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He laid the paper on the table, and Harry sat down and pretended to read it. But he did not understand anything of the jargon. The words danced up and down. He could only see "Beatrice," "freedom from care," "power to get away from Florence," and the final thought, the one which removed his last scruple, "Lanza can have the cottage, and I shall be clear of him forever."

Without a word he went for a pen and ink, and wrote his name boldly to the deed of relinquishment. Then Julius handed him a check for ten thousand pounds, and went with him to the bank in order to facilitate the transfer of the sum. Harry's credit. On the street, in the hot sunshine, they stood a few minutes.

"You are quite satisfied, Harry?"

"You have saved me from despair. Perhaps you have saved Beatrice. I am grateful to you."

"Have I done justly and honorably by you?"

"I believe you have."

"Then good-by. I must hasten home. Sophia will be anxious, and one never knows what may happen."

leave in the little burrah of their bows and courtesies, their smiles and their good wishes.

He went without delay straight to the small Italian village in which Harry had made his home. Harry's letters had prepared him for trouble and poverty, but he had little idea of the real condition of the heir of Sandal-Side. A few bare rooms in some dilapidated palace, grim with faded magnificence, and less and dull, was the kind of place he expected. He found him in a small cottage surrounded by a barren, sandy patch of ground overgrown with neglected vines and vagabond weeds. The interior was a room of consumption, a woman in the firm grip of consumption was lying; an emaciated, feverish woman, fretful with acute suffering. A little child, wan and waxy-looking, and apparently as ill as its mother, wailed in a cot by her side. Signor Lanza was sinking under the weight of the neglected acre which had been a vineyard or garden. Harry had gone into the village for some necessity; and when he returned Julius felt a shock and a pang of regret for the dashing young soldier squire that he had known as Harry Sandal.

He kissed his wife with passionate love and sorrow, and then turned to Julius with that mute look of inquiry which few find themselves able to resist.

"He is alive yet—much better, he says; and Charlotte thinks he may be in the fields again next season."

"Thank God! My poor Beatrice and her baby! You see what is coming to them."

"And I am so poor I cannot get her the change of air, the luxuries, the medicines, which would at least prolong life and make death easy."

"To back with me to Sandal-Side, and see the Squire; he may listen to you now."

"Never more! It was cruel of father to take my marriage in such a way. He turned my life's joy into a crime, costing every hour that was left me."

"People used to be so intense—a few strong feelings," as Mr. Wordsworth says—"to strong for ordinary life. We really can't afford to love and hate and suffer in such a tectonic way now; but the Squire came from the Middle Ages. This is a dreadful just place, Harry."

"Yes, it is. We were dreadfully deceived in it. I bought it, and we dreamed of vineyards and milk and wine, and a long, happy, simple life together. Nothing has prospered with us. We were swindled in the house and land. The Signor knows nothing about vines. He was brought to take about, and he spoke he laughed hysterically, and took Julius into an inner room. 'I don't want Beatrice to hear that I am out of money. She does not know that I am destitute. The sorrow, at least, I have kept from her.'

"Harry, I am going to make you a proposal. I want to be kind and just to you. I want to put you beyond the need of any one's help. Answer me one question first. If your father dies, what will you do?"

"You said he was getting better. For God's sake, do not speak of his death."

"I am supposing a case. You would then be Squire of Sandal-Side. Would you return there with Beatrice?"

"Ah, no! I know what those dalemen and their father's feelings were on their feelings intensified by his relation to me. They would look upon me as my father's murderer, and Beatrice as an accessory to the deed."

"Still, you would be Squire of Sandal-Side."

"Mother would have to take my place, or Charlotte. I have thought of that. I could not bear to sit in father's chair, and go up and down the house. I should see him always. I should hear continually his little cry with which he fell ill, even here, all the spaces of my memory and my dreams. I cannot go back to Sandal-Side. Nothing could take me back, not even my mother."

"Then listen. I am the heir falling you."

"No, no; there is my son Michael."

Julius was stunned for a moment. "Oh, yes! The child is a boy, then?"

"It is a boy. What were you going to say?"

"I was going to ask you to sell your rights in the house for ten thousand pounds. It would be better for you to have a sum like that in your hand at once than to trust to dribbling remittances sent now and then by women in charge. You could invest that sum to noble purpose in America, become a citizen of the country, and found an American line, as my father has founded an Indian one."

"The poor little chap makes no difference. He is only born to die. And I think your offer is a good one. I am so worn out, and things are really desperate with me. I never can look back to England. I am sick to death of Florence. There are places where Beatrice might even yet recover. Yes, for her sake, I will sell you my inheritance. Can I have the money soon?"

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