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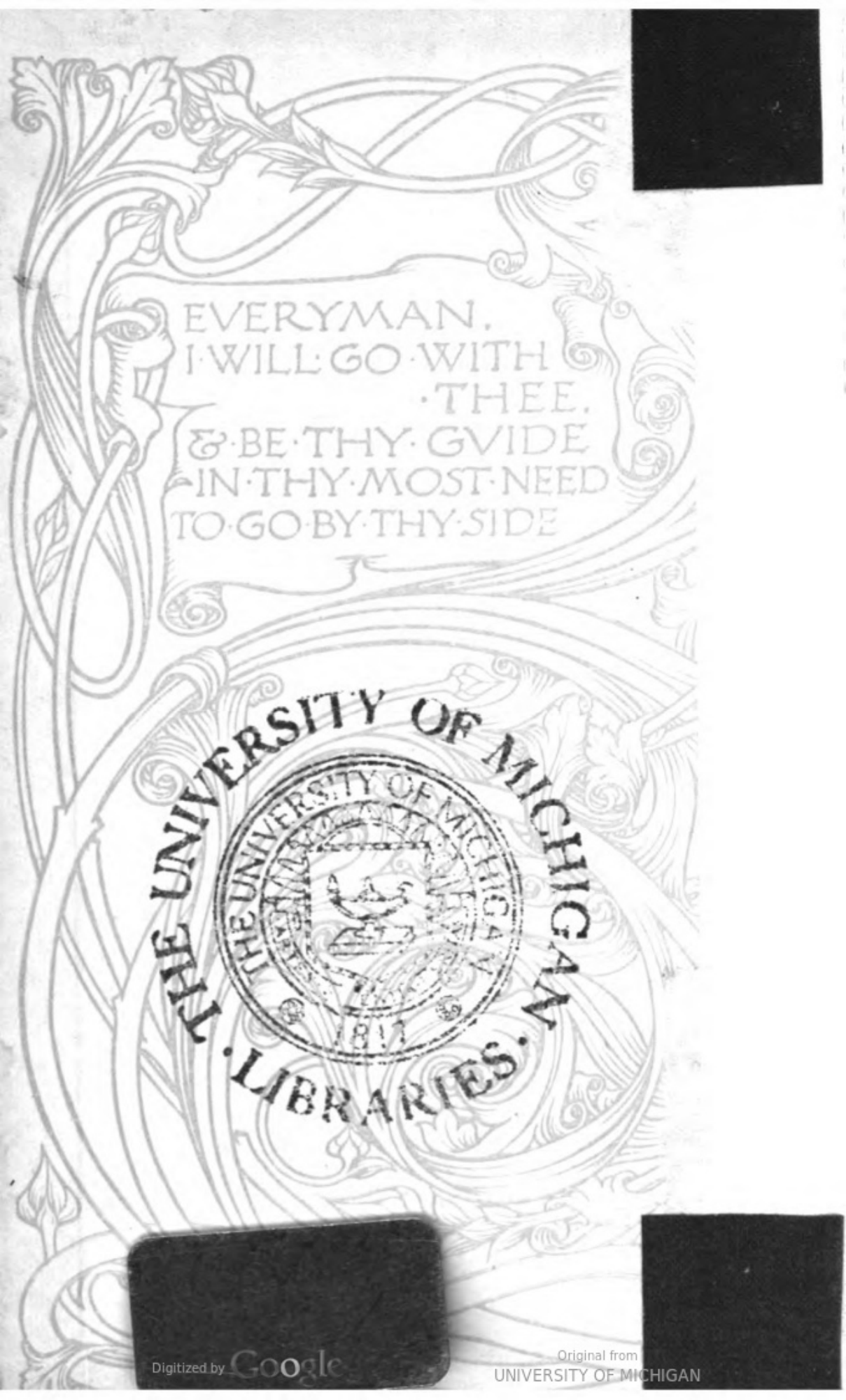


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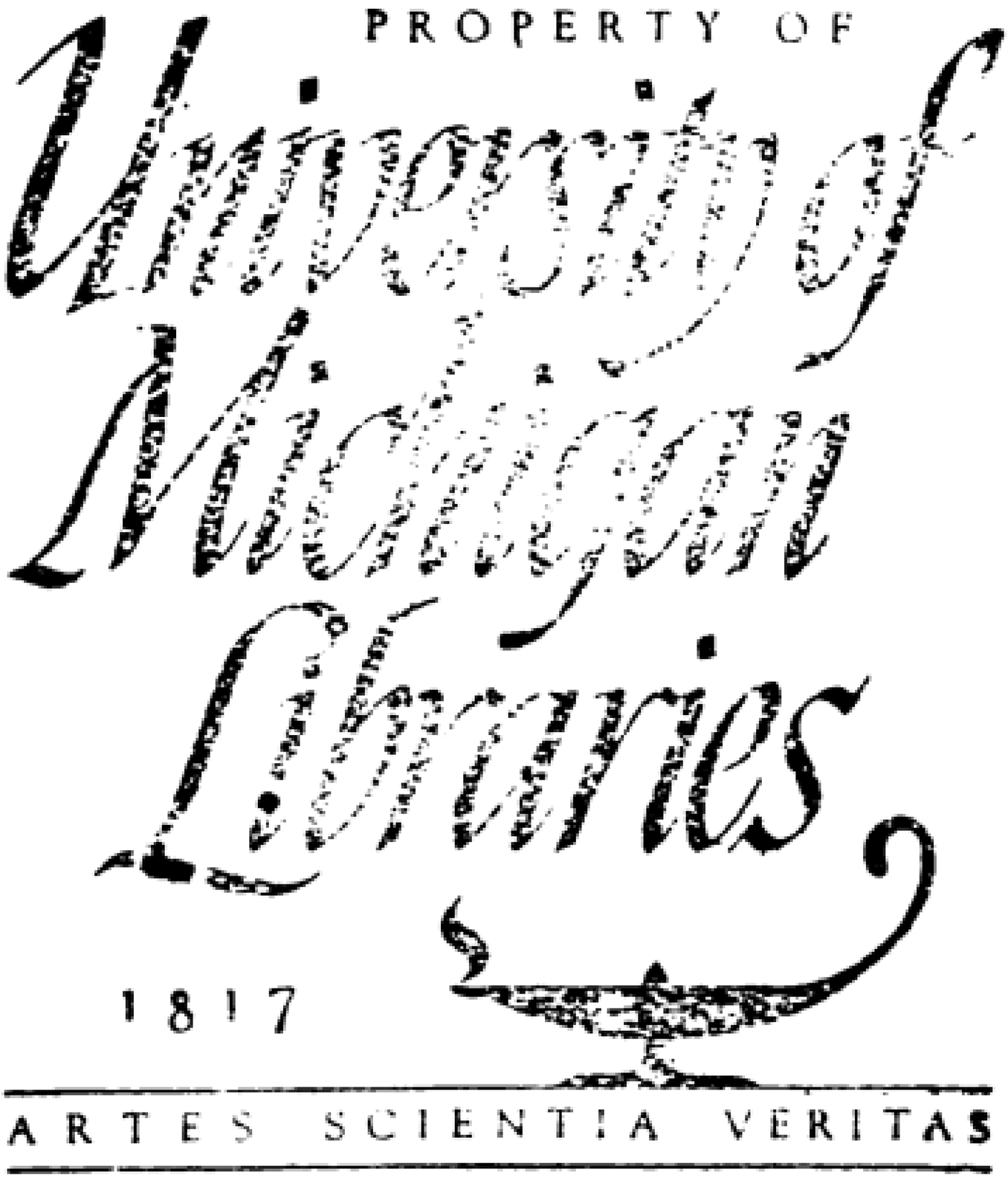


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FICTION

# MARY BARTON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

THOMAS SECCOMBE

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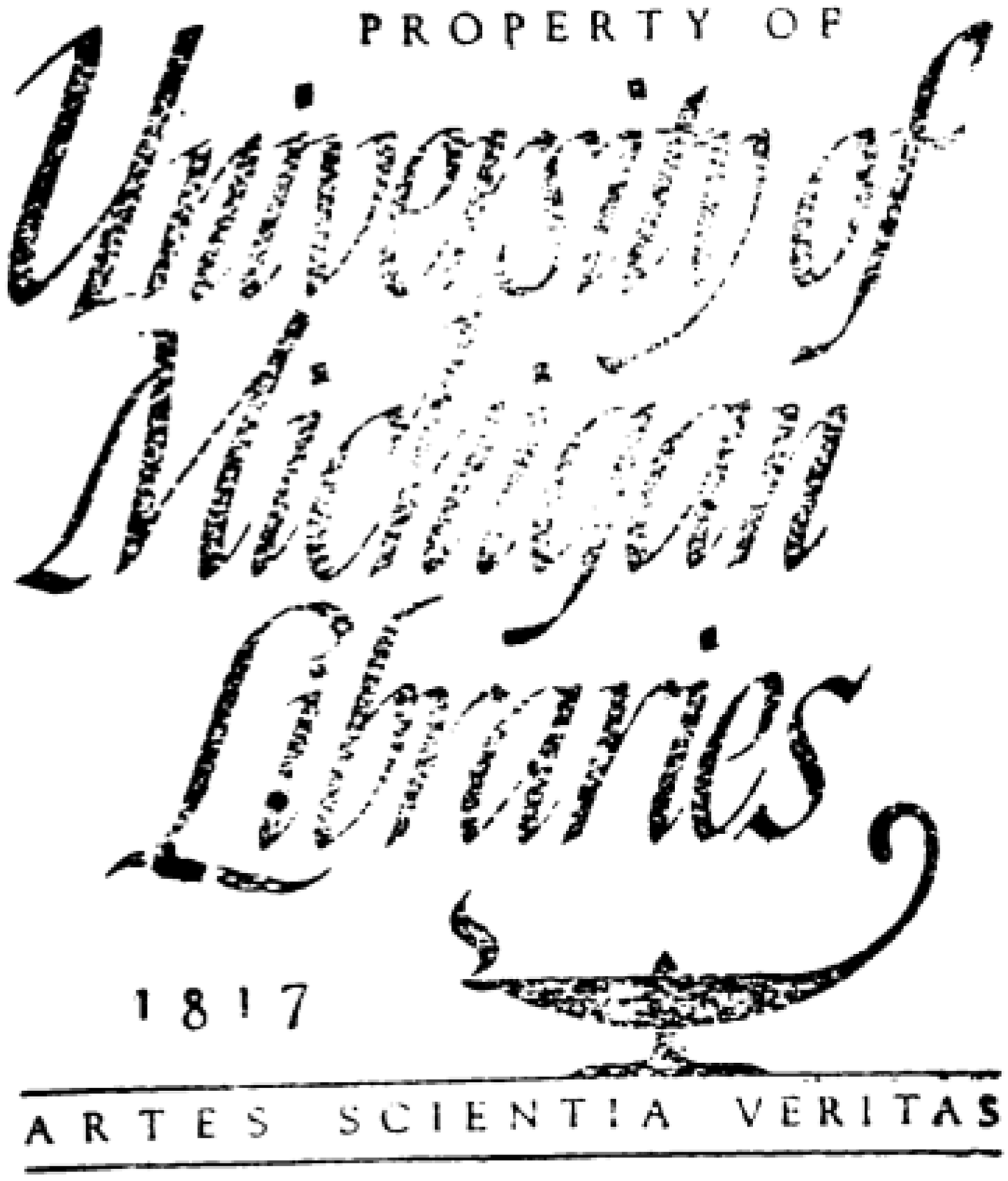


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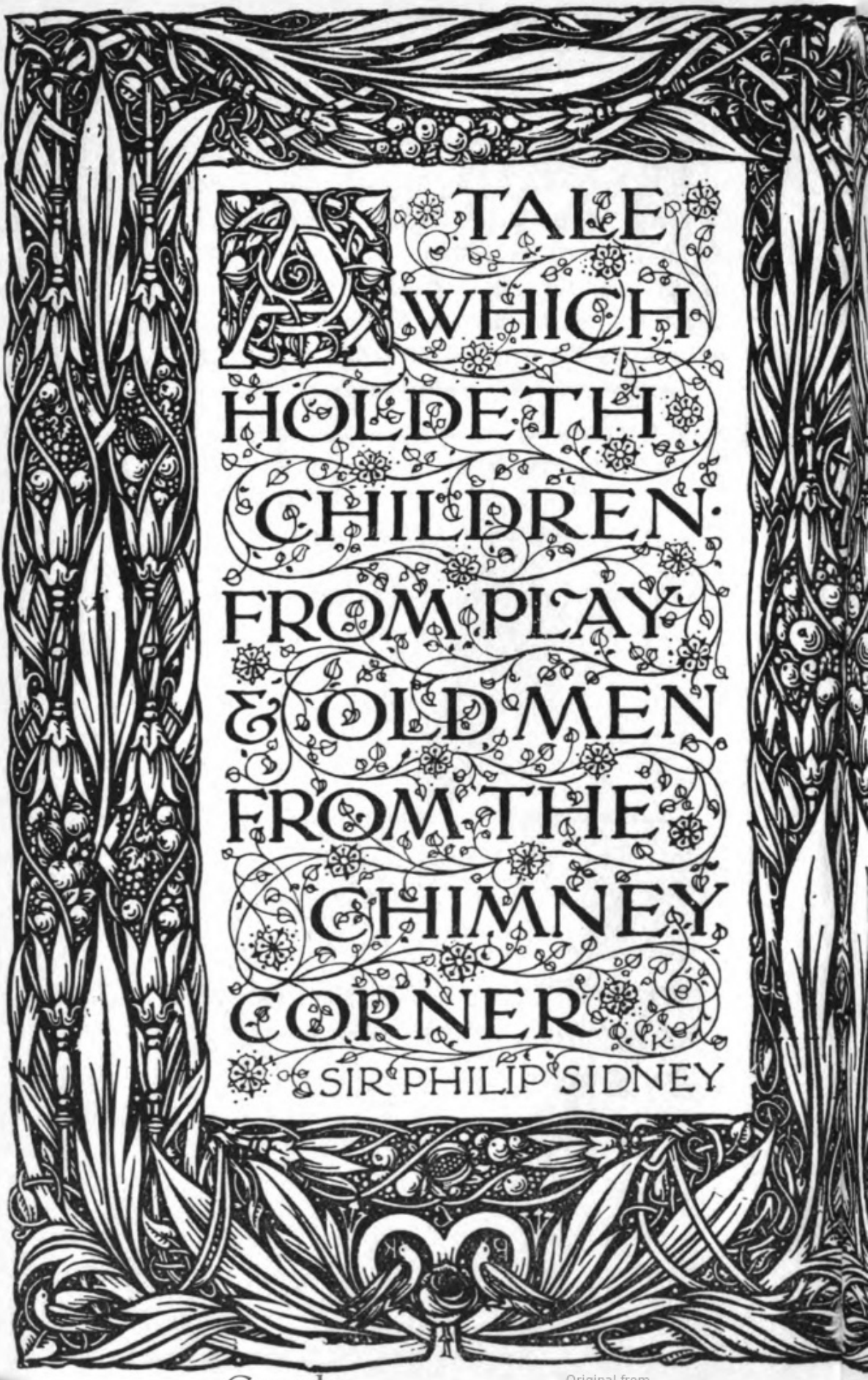


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# MARY BARTON BY MRS. GASKELL

EVERY MAN WILL GO WITH THEE BE THY GVIDE

IN THY MOST NEED TO GO BY THY SIDE

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# INTRODUCTION

*Mary Barton* belongs to the romance of nineteenth-century fiction; prose fiction under Victoria took the place of Elizabethan drama, and legend has clustered round the first books of those who made the nineteenth-century novel illustrious in England. Like *Pickwick*, *Jane Eyre*, *Adam Bede*, *The Warden*, and *Richard Feverel*, *Mary Barton* was a first serious attempt; like them, too, it was never entirely surpassed by more mature work, and even in an age which produced *Alton Locke*, *Sybil*, *Les Misérables*, and the *Christmas Carol*, in the strength of its compassion and the power of the plea that it makes for the poor, *Mary Barton* remains unrivalled. It is more intimate in its knowledge, it is a more accurate mirror of the life which it reflects than any competitor, and what seems perhaps to make it more exceptional still is the fact that this portrayal of poverty emanated from a comely and happy-conditioned married woman of thirty-seven, whose experience of the woe, the weariness, and the transience of human life one would have surmised to have been anything but profound.

Born at Chelsea in September 1810, Elizabeth Stevenson lost her mother at thirteen months, and was taken to live with her mother's sister — Aunt Lumb — her "more than mother," who dwelt in a tall red house on Knutsford Heath. As a child she was happy there, even though her aunt—whose means were circumscribed—had to practise in her modest household some of those elegant economies immortalised in *Cranford*, and at school in Stratford-on-Avon. At the age of seventeen she returned home to Chelsea, where her unhappiness under the *régime* of her father's second wife is probably faintly reflected in *Wives and Daughters*. There in April 1829, her father—a versatile, rather erudite, conscientious, and—we should imagine—rather easily domineered-over man—died, leaving by his second wife a son and a daughter, Catherine (Cynthia). His death terminated a two years of bondage and affliction for the elder daughter, who in a few



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months returned to Knutsford. During the next three years she made long visits to Newcastle, where she was connected with a Unitarian minister of considerable eminence, the Rev. William Turner (the original of Thurstan in *Ruth*). She also stayed with the Ramseys at Edinburgh, and with some of her Holland cousins in Essex. Little more than three years elapse from her father's death, and in the August of 1832 we find the beautiful Miss Stevenson framed for life as the wife of the Rev. William Gaskell, junior minister of the Cross Street Chapel in Manchester; he was twenty-seven and she was barely twenty-two. The chapel was situated in the storm centre of the desperate industrial conflict of the cruel thirties and hungry forties. To get a scientific picture of the life of, and the habitations occupied by the poor in Manchester during the cruel thirties and hungry forties, one must read—*The Condition of the Working Class in England in* 1844, by Frederick Engels, and Dr. J. P. Kay's *Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*. The description of the cattle sheds for human beings in the working-class portion of the city, and of the abominations attendant upon the overcrowding, and the emanations from the sewer-like rivers of Manchester, are too disgusting to be quoted here. Here is one of the least repulsive passages, describing the cottages in a spot known as Little Ireland, immediately south of the Oxford Road, Manchester, in a curve of the Medlock surrounded on all sides by tall factories, within about half a mile of the Cross Street Chapel. The description applies to the whole period in which the incidents of *Mary Barton* are cast:—

"The cottages are old, dirty, and of the smallest sort, the streets uneven, fallen into ruts, and in parts without drains or pavement; masses of refuse, offal, and sickening filth lie among standing pools in all directions; the atmosphere is poisoned by the effluvia from these, and laden and darkened by the smoke of a dozen tall factory chimneys. A horde of ragged women and children swarm about here, as filthy as the swine that thrive upon the garbage heaps and in the puddles. In short, the whole rookery furnishes such a hateful and repulsive spectacle as can hardly be equalled in the worst courts on the Irk. The race that lives in these ruinous cottages, behind broken windows, mended with oilskin, spring doors, and rotten door-posts, or in dark, wet cellars, in measureless

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filth and stench, in this atmosphere penned in as if with a purpose, this race must really have reached the lowest stage of humanity. This is the impression and the line of thought which the exterior of this district forces upon the beholder. But what must one think when he hears that in each of these pens, containing at most two rooms, a garret, and perhaps a cellar, on the average twenty human beings live; that in the whole region, for each one hundred and twenty persons, one usually inaccessible privy is provided; and that in spite of all the preachings of the physicians, in spite of the excitement into which the cholera epidemic plunged the sanitary police by reason of the condition of Little Ireland, in spite of everything, in this year of grace 1844, it is in almost the same state as in 1831! Dr. Kay asserts that not only the cellars but the first floors of all the houses in this district are damp; that a number of cellars once filled up with earth have now been emptied and are occupied once more by Irish people; that in one cellar the water constantly wells up through a hole stopped with clay, the cellar lying below the river level, so that its occupant, a handloom weaver, had to bale out the water from his dwelling every morning and pour it into the street!"

Twelve years after her happy marriage Mrs. Gaskell became a mother for the fourth time, and a few months later lost her only son, named William after father and grandfather. Coming on the top of the distress and starvation incidental to the strikes and lock-outs—of which she had been a witness—the blow for a time unsteadied her. Her husband had noticed that literary composition acted upon her as a sort of anodyne; he had discovered this in the course of several small experiments both in prose and verse which they had undertaken together. He now prescribed a work of larger scope and ambition, and placed at his wife's disposal much of his own laboriously garnered experience. The result was the production of *Mary Barton*, the composition of which occupied twelve months of absorbed but not uninterrupted work, and with intervals it occupied the whole of 1846 and 1847. Exactly midway between *Sybil* and *Alton Locke*, *Mary Barton* was published in two volumes under the pseudonym of "Cotton Mather Mills" in the early autumn of 1848. The publishers kept it for some months before they realised that the book had a strong topical interest, and then offered the author to purchase the copyright

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for £100, which was gladly accepted. The year, of course, was the year of revolution, the *annus mirabilis*, which witnessed among other things the fall to earth of July monarchy, the success of *Vanity Fair*, and the utter failure of the People's Charter—the Manchester school had killed it. *Mary Barton* was a pathetic plea for the vanquished: theoretically it amounted to little more than a variation on Samuel Bamford's pitiful lament "God help the poor;" but it irritated the rich mill-owners and the professors of the dismal science, who could find no place for the poor in their philosophy save under the euphemisms of labour and supply. In the history of ideas, *Mary Barton* will always occupy a noble place as the starting-point and rallying-cry of a new generation of Humanitarians, following that wave which had in England expended its energy upon slave emancipation.

But it is more than that. It is a starting-point in the history of the novel, and as a work of art I cannot think that Mrs. Gaskell, with all her experience, ever surpassed it. It was written under a strong pressure of emotion. It is impregnated by profound human sympathy tender and true. An unpretentious appeal by a new writer to the hearts of the multitude, it struck home equally as a revelation and as a plea for the down-trodden. And it achieved this result largely by a subordination both of purpose and of personality to a virtually new conception of the novel as a harmonious work of art. Manchester was observed, one might almost say perceived for the first time, by a "foreigner" who was yet thoroughly acclimatised and knew her subject. The characters, originally drawn from life, were carefully subdued to the requirements of the story. The plot had slowly engraved itself upon the same plate with the *dramatis personæ* in the writer's mind. Light and shadow are skilfully arranged, thought and emotion alternate, nothing is exaggerated, no side is taken, no sermon preached, no personality obtruded. Mrs. Gaskell was content to sink herself and to remain absorbed, her idiosyncrasy temporarily suspended in her work. She wrote a limpid style unhampered by any affectation or bizarrerie. Her dialogue is natural and spontaneous, her local colour fresh and unstudied. Her sympathies are deep, womanly, thoughtful, thoroughly normal. The result is a limitation, an economy, and a balance. The world is startled and surprised at being so taken by a simple thing. But it is no small thing, then or now, to have written a fragrant,

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healthy, ethical, English novel, which appealed to a world as wide as that addressed by either Scott or Dickens. "Forcible," "fair," and even "terrible" in its truth, are epithets employed by the *Athenæum* in its review of 21 October 1848.

The achievement admitted Mrs. Gaskell at once to the front rank of Victorian novelists. The three fairy gifts of fiction, knowledge of human nature, a good story, and a good style, were hers from the outset. The gods dowered her with right plots for her novels, and her descriptive powers were such that she could conjure up a tea-party given by one Lancashire operative to another with all the light and shade and glow of simple life and health and appetite of a real Dutch master. She touches the heart with instant force in the story of Old Alice.[1]

"I was young and thoughtless, and thought it was a fine thing to go so far from home. So, one day, th' butcher he brings us a letter fra George, to say he'd heard on a place—and I was all agog to go, and father was pleased like; but mother said little, and that little was very quiet. I've often thought she was a bit hurt to see me so ready to go—God forgive me! But she packed up my clothes, and some o' the better end of her own as would fit me, in yon little paper box up there—it's good for nought now, but I would liefer live without fire than break it up to be burnt; and yet it's going on for eighty years old, for she had it when she was a girl, and brought all her clothes in it to father's, when they were married. But, as I was saying, she did not cry, though the tears was often in her eyes; and I seen her looking after me down the lane as long as I were in sight, with her hand shading her eyes—and that were the last look I ever had on her."

The book is certainly a marvel of receptivity. It not only champions the poor; it describes them at pretty close quarters. It begins with a nice topographical touch describing Green Heys Fields, the site to-day of Moss Side Library, and Green Hay House, historical as the residence of De Quincey and J. A. Froude. The Ancoats tea-party, the fire at the mill, the picture of "Old Alice" (countrywoman of "Poor Susan," prototype of "Old Sally" in *Ruth* and "Old Betty" in *Phillis*), the succouring of the Davenports, the connoisseurship

[1] She had told the story in part before, in verse, in *Blackwood* for January 1837. In *Libbie Marsh*, too, she had already shown what she could do in pathetic idyll.

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of Job Legh, the sailor's return, the pursuit of the *John Cropper*—all these are scenes observed at first hand, verified and supplemented by the observation and knowledge of her husband. The conception of John Barton with his Burns-like hatred and contempt of the rich—

> "Like a do-nothing lady, worrying shopmen all morning, and screeching at her pianny all afternoon, and going to bed without having done a good turn to any one of God's creatures."
>
> "Thou never could abide the gentlefolk."
>
> "And what good have they ever done me! If I am sick, do they come and nurse me? If my child lies dying . . ."

> "A country fellow at the pleugh,
> His acres till'd, he's right eneugh . . .
> But Gentlemen, an' Ladies warst,
> Wi ev'ndown want o' wark are curst.
> They loiter, lounging, lank and lazy;
> Tho deil haet ails 'em, yet uneasy:
> Their days insipid, dull an' tasteless,
> Their nights unquiet, lang an' restless."

may have been suggested, I think, by a working-man counter-type of such characters in Scott as Balfour of Burley and Major Bridgenorth in *Peveril*. The conception was quickened and confirmed by the gesture of a typical operative of that day who put his hand on her arm when she was visiting and asked if *she* had ever had a child clemm'd to death. The central features of the murder (fixed up by lot) and the trial at Liverpool Assizes were suggested by the Ashton case of 1834.[1] In chapters thirty-three, thirty-four, and especially thirty-seven, there is a good deal of padding due to the publishers' nefarious pronunciamento that the book must be bulked out some six thousand words beyond its original length. Wayward and impulsive and, at times, nervously apprehensive as she was in her composition, Mrs. Gaskell clearly owed much in her work to a calm but decided domestic criticism. Her husband, it must be remembered, was one of those wise and well-doing, restful and serene, yet at the same time widely-instructed pastors which Unitarianism at its best produces and has produced in most abundance in the Palatine and West Riding.

*Mary Barton*, when all deductions are made, is one of the greatest novels of compassion that our country has produced. It ranks Mrs. Gaskell with Goldsmith, Hood, Dickens, and Mark Rutherford as one of the truest and most pathetic protectors of the poor. This story of shirtings can

[1] See *Mary Barton* (Frowde, 1906), with Introduction by C. K. Shorter, p. vii.

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move us not less than the "Song of a Shirt"—the "Chanson de la Chemise" of which a French critic writes succinctly, "Elle obtint un grand succès, mais ne produisit aucun resultat." The praise of Miss Edgeworth, Miss Martineau, the Howitts, Bamford, Landor, Carlyle, Forster, and Dickens made the happy and beaming authoress quite a literary personage. Dickens clamoured for copy from her, and *Our Society at Cranford* was the result. This with *Cousin Phillis* and *Wives and Daughters* reveals the lighter, more idyllic and, at the same time, fun-reflecting side of her nature. She was always fond of the sketch-structure. *Ruth* and *North and South* complete the working of the particular "pocket" of material which *Mary Barton* opened. *Sylvia's Lovers* stands apart, the sea-story of her early ambition, her greatest creative effort, perhaps her noblest work. But *Mary Barton* is first, in colouring, dramatic effect, and vividness, as the result of transcript from real life, unsurpassed by anything that she wrote during the whole of her eighteen years of production. She wrote it from a full heart. Most of our classical authoresses have been spinsters, childless. Mrs. Gaskell, a solitary exception, was the mother of a family and a pastor's wife as well. Where they speculated and imagined she observed and drew from the deep well of experience. When she describes the deaths of children, she feels what she has not merely seen but, unlike our excellent Hannahs, Marias, Janes, Harriets, Charlottes, and Mary Annes, actually felt. She was at the time of an age evocative of deep feeling. Charged with the pathos of life and the ubiquity of premature death and suffering, the book is full of unforced tears. To me it seems likely to outlast anything she wrote. Already it has lasted well. Over sixty-three years have elapsed since it appeared. Forty-seven have passed since the great novelist died. At that time Mrs. Gaskell was just completing *Wives and Daughters*, for the serial rights of which she obtained £2000 (in lieu of the £100 given outright for *Mary Barton*). Desiring a more secluded kind of literary leisure than either Plymouth Grove or Silverdale afforded, she was arranging a secondary home for herself in the south, at Holybourne, a short two miles north-east of Alton. The purchase was effected and Mrs. Gaskell was discussing some detail, *in situ*, with her daughters Meta, Florence, and Julia, and also the husband of Florence, Charles Compton, Q.C. It was a Sunday afternoon, 12th November 1865. Some of the party had gone to church,

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and it had been remarked how well Mrs. Gaskell was looking. Those at home were preparing tea in the drawing-room to the accompaniment of a blazing early-winter fire. Mrs. Gaskell was quoting to her son-in-law something that his father—dead just a fortnight before—had said, and it is a pathetic coincidence that, if she had finished the sentence in the process of utterance, her next words would have been "when I am dead." Before she was able to utter them she leaned forward and fell—dead. Incomplete as *Wives and Daughters* was, it is the most finished of all her works, and shows her powers at their ripest. She was buried in the graveyard of the little chapel in Brook Street, Knutsford, which had been familiar from childhood, and is faithfully described in *Ruth*. There, in June 1884, her husband was laid by her side.

THOMAS SECCOMBE.

The following is a complete list of Mrs. Gaskell's works:—

Clopton Hall, 1840 (*Howitt's Visits to Remarkable Places*); Mary Barton, 1848; The Moorland Cottage, 1850; The Schah's English Gardener, 1852 (*Household Words*); Cumberland Sheep Shearers, 1853 (*Household Words*); Ruth, 1853; Cranford, 1853; Modern Greek Songs, 1854 (*Household Words*); North and South, 1855; Lizzie Leigh and other tales, 1855; Life of Charlotte Brontë, 1857; Mabel Vaughan, 1857 (edited by Mrs. Gaskell, who also wrote the Preface); Round the Sofa and other tales, 1859; Right at Last and other tales, 1860; Preface to English Translation of Garibaldi at Caprera, 1862; Sylvia's Lovers, 1863 (*Everyman's Library*, 1911); A Dark Night's Work, 1863 (*All the Year Round*); An Italian Institution, 1863 (*All the Year Round*); The Cage at Cranford, 1863 (*All the Year Round*); Crowley Castle, 1863 (*All the Year Round*); French Life, 1864 (*Fraser's Magazine*); Cousin Phillis and other tales, 1865; The Grey Woman and other tales, 1865; Wives and Daughters, 1866 (posthumous).

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# PREFACE

THREE years ago I became anxious (from circumstances that need not be more fully alluded to) to employ myself in writing a work of fiction. Living in Manchester, but with a deep relish and fond admiration for the country, my first thought was to find a framework for my story in some rural scene; and I had already made a little progress in a tale, the period of which was more than a century ago, and the place on the borders of Yorkshire, when I bethought me how deep might be the romance in the lives of some of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town in which I resided. I had always felt a deep sympathy with the care-worn men, who looked as if doomed to struggle through their lives in strange alternations between work and want; tossed to and fro by circumstances, apparently in even a greater degree than other men. A little manifestation of this sympathy, and a little attention to the expression of feelings on the part of some of the work-people with whom I was acquainted, had laid open to me the hearts of one or two of the more thoughtful among them; I saw that they were sore and irritable against the rich, the even tenor of whose seeming happy lives appeared to increase the anguish caused by the lottery-like nature of their own. Whether the bitter complaints made by them, of the neglect which they experienced from the prosperou —especially from the masters whose fortunes they had helped to build up—were well-founded or no, it is not for me to judge. It is enough to say, that this belief of the injustice and unkindness which they endure from their fellow-creatures, taints what might be resignation to God's will, and turns it to revenge in too many of the poor uneducated factory workers of Manchester.

The more I reflected on this unhappy state of things between those so bound to each other by common interests, as the employers and the employed must ever be, the more anxious I became to give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time, convulses this dumb people; the agony of suffering without the sympathy of the happy, or of erroneously believing that such is the case. If it be an error that the woes, which



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come with ever-returning tide-like flood to overwhelm the workmen in our manufacturing towns, pass unregarded by all but the sufferers, it is at any rate an error so bitter in its consequences to all parties, that whatever public effort can do in the way of legislation, or private effort in the way of merciful deeds, or helpless love in the way of "widow's mites," should be done, and that speedily, to disabuse the work-people of so miserable a misapprehension. At present they seem to me to be left in a state wherein lamentations and tears are thrown aside as useless, but in which the lips are compressed for curses, and the hands clenched and ready to smite.

I know nothing of Political Economy, or the theories of trade. I have tried to write truthfully; and if my accounts agree or clash with any system, the agreement or disagreement is unintentional.

To myself the idea which I have formed of the state of feeling among too many of the factory people in Manchester, and which I endeavoured to represent in this tale (completed above a year ago), has received some confirmation from the events which have so recently occurred among a similar class on the Continent.

*October* 1848.

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# MARY BARTON

## A TALE OF MANCHESTER LIFE

### CHAPTER I

"Oh! 'tis hard, 'tis hard to be working
The whole of the live-long day,
When all the neighbours about one
Are off to their jaunts and play.

There's Richard he carries his baby,
And Mary takes little Jane,
And lovingly they'll be wandering
Through field and briery lane."

MANCHESTER SONG.

THERE are some fields near Manchester, well known to the inhabitants as "Green Heys Fields," through which runs a public footpath to a little village about two miles distant. In spite of these fields being flat and low, nay, in spite of the want of wood (the great and usual recommendation of level tracts of land), there is a charm about them which strikes even the inhabitant of a mountainous district, who sees and feels the effect of contrast in these common-place but thoroughly rural fields, with the busy, bustling manufacturing town he left but half an hour ago. Here and there an old black and white farm-house, with its rambling outbuildings, speaks of other times and other occupations than those which now absorb the population of the neighbourhood. Here in their seasons may be seen the country business of hay-making, ploughing, etc., which are such pleasant mysteries for townspeople to watch; and here the artisan, deafened with noise of tongues and engines, may come to listen awhile to the delicious sounds of rural life: the lowing of cattle, the milk-maids' call, the clatter and cackle of poultry in the old farm-yards. You cannot wonder, then, that these fields are popular places of resort at every holiday time; and you would not wonder, if you could see, or I properly describe, the charm of one particular stile, that it should be, on such occasions, a crowded halting-place. Close by it is a deep, clear pond, reflecting in its dark



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green depths the shadowy trees that bend over it to exclude the sun. The only place where its banks are shelving is on the side next to a rambling farm-yard, belonging to one of those old-world, gabled, black and white houses I named above, overlooking the field through which the public footpath leads. The porch of this farm-house is covered by a rose-tree; and the little garden surrounding it is crowded with a medley of old-fashioned herbs and flowers, planted long ago, when the garden was the only druggist's shop within reach, and allowed to grow in scrambling and wild luxuriance—roses, lavender, sage, balm (for tea), rosemary, pinks and wallflowers, onions and jessamine, in most republican and indiscriminate order. This farm-house and garden are within a hundred yards of the stile of which I spoke, leading from the large pasture field into a smaller one, divided by a hedge of hawthorn and black-thorn; and near this stile, on the further side, there runs a tale that primroses may often be found, and occasionally the blue sweet violet on the grassy hedge bank.

I do not know whether it was on a holiday granted by the masters, or a holiday seized in right of nature and her beautiful spring time by the workmen, but one afternoon (now ten or a dozen years ago) these fields were much thronged. It was an early May evening — the April of the poets; for heavy showers had fallen all the morning, and the round, soft, white clouds which were blown by a west wind over the dark blue sky, were sometimes varied by one blacker and more threatening. The softness of the day tempted forth the young green leaves, which almost visibly fluttered into life; and the willows, which that morning had had only a brown reflection in the water below, were now of that tender grey-green which blends so delicately with the spring harmony of colours.

Groups of merry and somewhat loud-talking girls, whose ages might range from twelve to twenty, came by with a buoyant step. They were most of them factory girls, and wore the usual out-of-doors dress of that particular class of maidens; namely, a shawl, which at mid-day or in fine weather was allowed to be merely a shawl, but towards evening, or if the day were chilly, became a sort of Spanish mantilla or Scotch plaid, and was brought over the head and hung loosely down, or was pinned under the chin in no unpicturesque fashion.

Their faces were not remarkable for beauty; indeed, they were below the average, with one or two exceptions; they had dark hair, neatly and classically arranged, dark eyes, but sallow

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complexions and irregular features. The only thing to strike a passer-by was an acuteness and intelligence of countenance, which has often been noticed in a manufacturing population.

There were also numbers of boys, or rather young men, rambling among these fields, ready to bandy jokes with any one, and particularly ready to enter into conversation with the girls, who, however, held themselves aloof, not in a shy, but rather in an independent way, assuming an indifferent manner to the noisy wit or obstreperous compliments of the lads. Here and there came a sober quiet couple, either whispering lovers, or husband and wife, as the case might be; and if the latter, they were seldom unencumbered by an infant, carried for the most part by the father, while occasionally even three or four little toddlers had been carried or dragged thus far, in order that the whole family might enjoy the delicious May afternoon together.

Sometime in the course of that afternoon, two working men met with friendly greeting at the stile so often named. One was a thorough specimen of a Manchester man; born of factory workers, and himself bred up in youth, and living in manhood, among the mills. He was below the middle size and slightly made; there was almost a stunted look about him; and his wan, colourless face gave you the idea that in his childhood he had suffered from the scanty living consequent upon bad times and improvident habits. His features were strongly marked, though not irregular, and their expression was extreme earnestness; resolute either for good or evil, a sort of latent, stern enthusiasm. At the time of which I write, the good predominated over the bad in the countenance, and he was one from whom a stranger would have asked a favour with tolerable faith that it would be granted. He was accompanied by his wife, who might, without exaggeration, have been called a lovely woman, although now her face was swollen with crying, and often hidden behind her apron. She had the fresh beauty of the agricultural districts; and somewhat of the deficiency of sense in her countenance, which is likewise characteristic of the rural inhabitants in comparison with the natives of the manufacturing towns. She was far advanced in pregnancy, which perhaps occasioned the overpowering and hysterical nature of her grief. The friend whom they met was more handsome and less sensible-looking than the man I have just described; he seemed hearty and hopeful, and although his age was greater, yet there was far more of youth's buoyancy

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in his appearance. He was tenderly carrying a baby in arms, while his wife, a delicate, fragile-looking woman, limping in her gait, bore another of the same age; little, feeble twins, inheriting the frail appearance of their mother.

The last-mentioned man was the first to speak, while a sudden look of sympathy dimmed his gladsome face. "Well, John, how goes it with you?" and, in a lower voice, he added, "any news of Esther, yet?" Meanwhile the wives greeted each other like old friends, the soft and plaintive voice of the mother of the twins seeming to call forth only fresh sobs from Mrs. Barton.

"Come, women," said John Barton, "you've both walked far enough. My Mary expects to have her bed in three weeks; and as for you, Mrs. Wilson, you know you are but a cranky sort of a body at the best of times." This was said so kindly that no offence could be taken. "Sit you down here; the grass is well nigh dry by this time; and you're neither of you nesh [1] folk about taking cold. Stay," he added, with some tenderness, "here's my pocket-handkerchief to spread under you to save the gowns women always think so much of; and now, Mrs. Wilson, give me the baby, I may as well carry him, while you talk and comfort my wife; poor thing, she takes on sadly about Esther."

These arrangements were soon completed: the two women sat down on the blue cotton handkerchiefs of their husbands, and the latter, each carrying a baby, set off for a further walk; but as soon as Barton had turned his back upon his wife, his countenance fell back into an expression of gloom.

"Then you've heard nothing of Esther, poor lass?" asked Wilson.

"No, nor shan't, as I take it. My mind is, she's gone off with somebody. My wife frets, and thinks she's drowned herself, but I tell her, folks don't care to put on their best clothes to drown themselves; and Mrs. Bradshaw (where she lodged, you know) says the last time she set eyes on her was last Tuesday, when she came downstairs, dressed in her Sunday gown, and with a new ribbon in her bonnet, and gloves on her hands, like the lady she was so fond of thinking herself."

"She was as pretty a creature as ever the sun shone on."

"Ay, she was a farrantly [2] lass; more's the pity now," added Barton, with a sigh. "You see them Buckinghamshire people

[1] "Nesh;" Anglo-Saxon, nesc, tender.
[2] "Farrantly," comely, pleasant-looking.

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as comes to work in Manchester has quite a different look with them to us Manchester folk. You'll not see among the Manchester wenches such fresh rosy cheeks, or such black lashes to grey eyes (making them look like black), as my wife and Esther had. I never seed two such pretty women for sisters; never. Not but what beauty is a sad snare. Here was Esther so puffed up, that there was no holding her in. Her spirit was always up, if I spoke ever so little in the way of advice to her; my wife spoiled her, it is true, for you see she was so much older than Esther she was more like a mother to her, doing everything for her."

"I wonder she ever left you," observed his friend.

"That's the worst of factory work, for girls. They can earn so much when work is plenty, that they can maintain themselves anyhow. My Mary shall never work in a factory, that I'm determined on. You see Esther spent her money in dress, thinking to set off her pretty face; and got to come home so late at night, that at last I told her my mind: my missis thinks I spoke crossly, but I meant right, for I loved Esther, if it was only for Mary's sake. Says I, 'Esther, I see what you'll end at with your artificials, and your fly-away veils, and stopping out when honest women are in their beds; you'll be a street-walker, Esther, and then, don't you go to think I'll have you darken my door, though my wife is your sister.' So says she, 'Don't trouble yourself, John. I'll pack up and be off now, for I'll never stay to hear myself called as you call me.' She flushed up like a turkey-cock, and I thought fire would come out of her eyes; but when she saw Mary cry (for Mary can't abide words in a house), she went and kissed her, and said she was not so bad as I thought her. So we talked more friendly, for, as I said, I liked the lass well enough, and her pretty looks, and her cheery ways. But she said (and at the time I thought there was sense in what she said) we should be much better friends if she went into lodgings, and only came to see us now and then."

"Then you still were friendly. Folks said you'd cast her off, and said you'd never speak to her again."

"Folks always make one a deal worse than one is," said John Barton, testily. "She came many a time to our house after she left off living with us. Last Sunday se'nnight—no! it was this very last Sunday, she came to drink a cup of tea with Mary; and that was the last time we set eyes on her."

"Was she any ways different in her manner?" asked Wilson.

"Well, I don't know. I have thought several times since,

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that she was a bit quieter, and more womanly-like; more gentle, and more blushing, and not so riotous and noisy. She comes in, toward four o'clock, when afternoon church was loosing, and she goes and hangs her bonnet up on the old nail we used to call hers, while she lived with us. I remember thinking what a pretty lass she was, as she sat on a low stool by Mary, who was rocking herself, and in rather a poor way. She laughed and cried by turns, but all so softly and gently, like a child, that I could not find in my heart to scold her, especially as Mary was fretting already. One thing I do remember I did say, and pretty sharply too. She took our little Mary by the waist, and——"

"Thou must leave off calling her 'little' Mary, she's growing up into as fine a lass as one can see on a summer's day; more of her mother's stock than thine," interrupted Wilson.

"Well, well, I call her 'little' because her mother's name is Mary. But, as I was saying, she takes Mary in a coaxing sort of way, and 'Mary' says she, 'what should you think if I sent for you some day and made a lady of you.' So I could not stand such talk as that to my girl, and I said, 'Thou'd best not put that nonsense in the girl's head I can tell thee; I'd rather see her earning her bread by the sweat of her brow, as the Bible tells her she should do, ay, though she never got butter to her bread, than be like a do-nothing lady, worrying shopmen all morning, and screeching at her pianny all afternoon, and going to bed without having done a good turn to any one of God's creatures but herself.'"

"Thou never could abide the gentlefolk," said Wilson, half amused at his friend's vehemence.

"And what good have they ever done me that I should like them?" asked Barton, the latent fire lighting up his eye: and bursting forth, he continued, "If I am sick, do they come and nurse me? If my child lies dying (as poor Tom lay, with his white wan lips quivering, for want of better food than I could give him), does the rich man bring the wine or broth that might save his life? If I am out of work for weeks in the bad times, and winter comes, with black frost, and keen east wind, and there is no coal for the grate, and no clothes for the bed, and the thin bones are seen through the ragged clothes, does the rich man share his plenty with me, as he ought to do, if his religion was not a humbug? When I lie on my death-bed, and Mary (bless her) stands fretting, as I know she will fret," and here his voice faltered a little, "will a rich lady come and take her to her own

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home if need be, till she can look round, and see what best to do? No, I tell you, it's the poor, and the poor only, as does such things for the poor. Don't think to come over me with the old tale, that the rich know nothing of the trials of the poor. I say, if they don't know, they ought to know. We are their slaves as long as we can work; we pile up their fortunes with the sweat of our brows; and yet we are to live as separate as if we were in two worlds; ay, as separate as Dives and Lazarus, with a great gulf betwixt us: but I know who was best off then," and he wound up his speech with a low chuckle that had no mirth in it.

"Well, neighbour," said Wilson, "all that may be very true, but what I want to know now is about Esther—when did you last hear of her?"

"Why, she took leave of us that Sunday night in a very loving way, kissing both wife Mary, and daughter Mary (if I must not call her little), and shaking hands with me; but all in a cheerful sort of manner, so we thought nothing about her kisses and shakes. But on Wednesday night comes Mrs. Bradshaw's son with Esther's box, and presently Mrs. Bradshaw follows with the key; and when we began to talk, we found Esther told her she was coming back to live with us, and would pay her week's money for not giving notice; and on Tuesday night she carried off a little bundle (her best clothes were on her back, as I said before), and told Mrs. Bradshaw not to hurry herself about the big box, but bring it when she had time. So of course she thought she should find Esther with us; and when she told her story, my missis set up such a screech, and fell down in a dead swoon. Mary ran up with water for her mother, and I thought so much about my wife, I did not seem to care at all for Esther. But the next day I asked all the neighbours (both our own and Bradshaw's) and they'd none of them heard or seen nothing of her. I even went to a policeman, a good enough sort of man, but a fellow I'd never spoke to before because of his livery, and I asks him if his 'cuteness could find anything out for us. So I believe he asks other policemen; and one on 'em had seen a wench, like our Esther, walking very quickly, with a bundle under her arm, on Tuesday night, toward eight o'clock, and get into a hackney coach, near Hulme Church, and we don't know the number, and can't trace it no further. I'm sorry enough for the girl, for bad's come over her, one way or another, but I'm sorrier for my wife. She loved her next to me and Mary, and she's never been the same body since poor Tom's

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death. However, let's go back to them; your old woman may have done her good."

As they walked homewards with a brisker pace, Wilson expressed a wish that they still were the near neighbours they once had been.

"Still our Alice lives in the cellar under No. 14, in Barber Street, and if you'd only speak the word she'd be with you in five minutes, to keep your wife company when she's lonesome. Though I'm Alice's brother, and perhaps ought not to say it, I will say there's none more ready to help with heart or hand than she is. Though she may have done a hard day's wash, there's not a child ill within the street but Alice goes to offer to sit up, and does sit up too, though may be she's to be at her work by six next morning."

"She's a poor woman, and can feel for the poor, Wilson," was Barton's reply; and then he added, "Thank you kindly for your offer, and mayhap I may trouble her to be a bit with my wife, for while I'm at work, and Mary's at school, I know she frets above a bit. See, there's Mary!" and the father's eye brightened, as in the distance, among a group of girls, he spied his only daughter, a bonny lassie of thirteen or so, who came bounding along to meet and to greet her father, in a manner which showed that the stern-looking man had a tender nature within. The two men had crossed the last stile, while Mary loitered behind to gather some buds of the coming hawthorn, when an over-grown lad came past her, and snatched a kiss, exclaiming, "For old acquaintance sake, Mary."

"Take that for old acquaintance sake, then," said the girl, blushing rosy red, more with anger than shame, as she slapped his face. The tones of her voice called back her father and his friend, and the aggressor proved to be the eldest son of the latter, the senior by eighteen years of his little brothers.

"Here, children, instead o' kissing and quarrelling, do ye each take a baby, for if Wilson's arms be like mine they are heartily tired."

Mary sprang forward to take her father's charge, with a girl's fondness for infants, and with some little foresight of the event soon to happen at home; while young Wilson seemed to lose his rough, cubbish nature as he crowed and cooed to his little brother.

"Twins is a great trial to a poor man, bless em," said the half-proud, half-weary father, as he bestowed a smacking kiss on the babe ere he parted with it

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## CHAPTER II

**" Polly, put the kettle on,**
**And let's have tea!**
**Polly, put the kettle on,**
**And we'll all have tea."**

" HERE we are, wife; didst thou think thou'd lost us? " quoth hearty-voiced Wilson, as the two women rose and shook themselves in preparation for their homeward walk. Mrs. Barton was evidently soothed, if not cheered, by the unburdening of her fears and thoughts to her friend; and her approving look went far to second her husband's invitation that the whole party should adjourn from Green Heys Fields to tea, at the Bartons' house. The only faint opposition was raised by Mrs. Wilson, on account of the lateness of the hour at which they would probably return, which she feared on her babies' account.

" Now, hold your tongue, missis, will you? " said her husband, good-temperedly. " Don't you know them brats never goes to sleep till long past ten? and haven't you a shawl, under which you can tuck one lad's head, as safe as a bird's under its wing? And as for t'other one, I'll put it in my pocket rather than not stay, now we are this far away from Ancoats."

" Or I can lend you another shawl," suggested Mrs. Barton.

" Ay, anything rather than not stay."

The matter being decided, the party proceeded home, through many half-finished streets, all so like one another that you might have easily been bewildered and lost your way. Not a step, however, did our friends lose; down this entry, cutting off that corner, until they turned out of one of these innumerable streets into a little paved court, having the backs of houses at the end opposite to the opening, and a gutter running through the middle to carry off household slops, washing suds, etc. The women who lived in the court were busy taking in strings of caps, frocks, and various articles of linen, which hung from side to side, dangling so low, that if our friends had been a few minutes sooner, they would have had to stoop very much, or else the half-wet clothes would have flapped in their faces: but although the evening seemed yet early when they were in the open fields—among the pent-up houses, night, with its mists, and its darkness, had already begun to fall.

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Many greetings were given and exchanged between the Wilsons and these women, for not long ago they had also dwelt in this court.

Two rude lads, standing at a disorderly looking house-door, exclaimed, as Mary Barton (the daughter) passed, "Eh, look! Polly Barton's gotten a sweetheart."

Of course this referred to young Wilson, who stole a look to see how Mary took the idea. He saw her assume the air of a young fury, and to his next speech she answered not a word.

Mrs. Barton produced the key of the door from her pocket; and on entering the house-place it seemed as if they were in total darkness, except one bright spot, which might be a cat's eye, or might be, what it was, a red-hot fire, smouldering under a large piece of coal, which John Barton immediately applied himself to break up, and the effect instantly produced was warm and glowing light in every corner of the room. To add to this (although the coarse yellow glare seemed lost in the ruddy glow from the fire), Mrs. Barton lighted a dip by sticking it in the fire, and having placed it satisfactorily in a tin candle-stick, began to look further about her, on hospitable thoughts intent. The room was tolerably large, and possessed many conveniences. On the right of the door, as you entered, was a longish window, with a broad ledge. On each side of this, hung blue-and-white check curtains, which were now drawn, to shut in the friends met to enjoy themselves. Two geraniums, unpruned and leafy, which stood on the sill, formed a further defence from out-door pryers. In the corner between the window and the fire-side was a cupboard, apparently full of plates and dishes, cups and saucers, and some more nondescript articles, for which one would have fancied their possessors could find no use—such as triangular pieces of glass to save carving knives and forks from dirtying table-cloths. However, it was evident Mrs. Barton was proud of her crockery and glass, for she left her cupboard door open, with a glance round of satisfaction and pleasure. On the opposite side to the door and window was the staircase, and two doors; one of which (the nearest to the fire), led into a sort of little back kitchen, where dirty work, such as washing up dishes, might be done, and whose shelves served as larder, and pantry, and store-room, and all. The other door, which was considerably lower, opened into the coal-hole—the slanting closet under the stairs; from which, to the fire-place, there was a gay-coloured piece of oil-cloth laid. The place seemed almost crammed with furniture (sure sign of

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good times among the mills). Beneath the window was a dresser with three deep drawers. Opposite the fire-place was a table, which I should call a Pembroke, only that it was made of deal, and I cannot tell how far such a name may be applied to such humble material. On it, resting against the wall, was a bright green japanned tea-tray, having a couple of scarlet lovers embracing in the middle. The fire-light danced merrily on this, and really (setting all taste but that of a child's aside) it gave a richness of colouring to that side of the room. It was in some measure propped up by a crimson tea-caddy, also of japan ware. A round table on one branching leg really for use, stood in the corresponding corner to the cupboard; and, if you can picture all this with a washy, but clean stencilled pattern on the walls, you can form some idea of John Barton's home.

The tray was soon hoisted down, and before the merry chatter of cups and saucers began, the women disburdened themselves of their out-of-door things, and sent Mary upstairs with them. Then came a long whispering, and chinking of money, to which Mr. and Mrs. Wilson were too polite to attend; knowing, as they did full well, that it all related to the preparations for hospitality; hospitality that, in their turn, they should have such pleasure in offering. So they tried to be busily occupied with the children, and not to hear Mrs. Barton's directions to Mary.

"Run, Mary dear, just round the corner, and get some fresh eggs at Tipping's (you may get one a-piece, that will be five-pence), and see if he has any nice ham cut, that he would let us have a pound of."

"Say two pounds, missis, and don't be stingy," chimed in the husband.

"Well, a pound and a half, Mary. And get it Cumberland ham, for Wilson comes from there-away, and it will have a sort of relish of home with it he'll like,—and Mary" (seeing the lassie fain to be off), "you must get a pennyworth of milk and a loaf of bread—mind you get it fresh and new—and, and—that's all, Mary.

"No, it's not all," said her husband. "Thou must get six-pennyworth of rum, to warm the tea; thou'll get it at the 'Grapes.' And thou just go to Alice Wilson; he says she lives just right round the corner, under 14, Barber Street" (this was addressed to his wife), "and tell her to come and take her tea with us; she'll like to see her brother, I'll be bound, let alone Jane and the twins."

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"If she comes she must bring a tea-cup and saucer, for we have but half-a-dozen, and here's six of us," said Mrs. Barton.

"Pooh! pooh! Jem and Mary can drink out of one, surely."

But Mary secretly determined to take care that Alice brought her tea-cup and saucer, if the alternative was to be her sharing anything with Jem.

Alice Wilson had but just come in. She had been out all day in the fields, gathering wild herbs for drinks and medicine, for in addition to her invaluable qualities as a sick nurse and her worldly occupations as a washerwoman, she added a considerable knowledge of hedge and field simples; and on fine days, when no more profitable occupation offered itself, she used to ramble off into the lanes and meadows as far as her legs could carry her. This evening she had returned loaded with nettles, and her first object was to light a candle and see to hang them up in bunches in every available place in her cellar room. It was the perfection of cleanliness: in one corner stood the modest looking bed, with a check curtain at the head, the whitewashed wall filling up the place where the corresponding one should have been. The floor was bricked, and scrupulously clean, although so damp that it seemed as if the last washing would never dry up. As the cellar window looked into an area in the street, down which boys might throw stones, it was protected by an outside shelter, and was oddly festooned with all manner of hedgerow, ditch, and field plants, which we are accustomed to call valueless, but which have a powerful effect either for good or for evil, and are consequently much used among the poor. The room was strewed, hung, and darkened with these bunches, which emitted no very fragrant odour in their process of drying. In one corner was a sort of broad hanging shelf, made of old planks, where some old hoards of Alice's were kept. Her little bit of crockery ware was ranged on the mantelpiece, where also stood her candlestick and box of matches. A small cupboard contained at the bottom coals, and at the top her bread and basin of oatmeal, her frying-pan, teapot, and a small tin saucepan which served as a bottle, as well as for cooking the delicate little messes of broth which Alice sometimes was able to manufacture for a sick neighbour.

After her walk she felt chilly and weary, and was busy trying to light her fire with the damp coals, and half green sticks, when Mary knocked.

"Come in," said Alice, remembering, however, that she had

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barred the door for the night, and hastening to make it possible for any one to come in.

"Is that you, Mary Barton?" exclaimed she, as the light from her candle streamed on the girl's face. "How you are grown since I used to see you at my brother's! Come in, lass, come in."

"Please," said Mary, almost breathless, "mother says you're to come to tea, and bring your cup and saucer, for George and Jane Wilson is with us, and the twins, and Jem. And you're to make haste, please."

"I'm sure it's very neighbourly and kind in your mother, and I'll come, with many thanks. Stay, Mary, has your mother got any nettles for spring drink? If she hasn't I'll take her some."

"No, I don't think she has."

Mary ran off like a hare to fulfil what, to a girl of thirteen, fond of power, was the more interesting part of her errand—the money-spending part. And well and ably did she perform her business, returning home with a little bottle of rum, and the eggs in one hand, while her other was filled with some excellent red-and-white, smoke-flavoured, Cumberland ham, wrapped up in paper.

She was at home, and frying ham, before Alice had chosen her nettles, put out her candle, locked her door, and walked in a very foot-sore manner as far as John Barton's. What an aspect of comfort did his house-place present, after her humble cellar. She did not think of comparing; but for all that she felt the delicious glow of the fire, the bright light that revelled in every corner of the room, the savoury smells, the comfortable sounds of a boiling kettle, and the hissing, frizzling ham. With a little old-fashioned curtsey she shut the door, and replied with a loving heart to the boisterous and surprised greeting of her brother.

And now all preparations being made, the party sat down. Mrs. Wilson in the post of honour, the rocking-chair on the right hand side of the fire, nursing her baby, while its father, in an opposite arm-chair tried vainly to quieten the other with bread soaked in milk.

Mrs. Barton knew manners too well, to do anything but sit at the tea-table and make tea, though in her heart she longed to be able to superintend the frying of the ham, and cast many an anxious look at Mary as she broke the eggs and turned the ham, with a very comfortable portion of confidence in her own culinary powers. Jem stood awkwardly leaning against the dresser,

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replying rather gruffly to his aunt's speeches, which gave him, he thought, the air of being a little boy; whereas he considered himself as a young man, and not so very young neither, as in two months he would be eighteen. Barton vibrated between the fire and the tea-table, his only drawback being a fancy that every now and then his wife's face flushed and contracted as if in pain.

At length the business actually began. Knives and forks, cups and saucers made a noise, but human voices were still, for human beings were hungry and had no time to speak. Alice first broke silence; holding her tea-cup with the manner of one proposing a toast, she said, "Here's to absent friends. Friends may meet, but mountains never."

It was an unlucky toast or sentiment, as she instantly felt. Every one thought of Esther, the absent Esther; and Mrs. Barton put down her food, and could not hide the fast dropping tears. Alice could have bitten her tongue out.

It was a wet blanket to the evening; for though all had been said and suggested in the fields that could be said or suggested, every one had a wish to say something in the way of comfort to poor Mrs. Barton, and a dislike to talk about anything else while her tears fell fast and scalding. So George Wilson, his wife, and children, set off early home, not before (in spite of *mal-à-propos* speeches) they had expressed a wish that such meetings might often take place, and not before John Barton had given his hearty consent; and declared that as soon as ever his wife was well again they would have just such another evening.

"I will take care not to come and spoil it," thought poor Alice, and going up to Mrs. Barton, she took her hand almost humbly, and said, "You don't know how sorry I am I said it."

To her surprise, a surprise that brought tears of joy into her eyes, Mary Barton put her arms round her neck, and kissed the self-reproaching Alice. "You didn't mean any harm, and it was me as was so foolish; only this work about Esther, and not knowing where she is, lies so heavy on my heart. Good-night, and never think no more about it. God bless you, Alice."

Many and many a time, as Alice reviewed that evening in her after life, did she bless Mary Barton for these kind and thoughtful words. But just then all she could say was, "Good-night, Mary, and may God bless *you*."

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## CHAPTER III

" But when the morn came dim and sad,
And chill with early showers,
Her quiet eyelids closed—she had
Another morn than ours."

HOOD.

IN the middle of that same night a neighbour of the Bartons was roused from her sound, well-earned sleep, by a knocking, which had at first made part of her dream; but starting up, as soon as she became convinced of its reality, she opened the window, and asked who was there?

" Me, John Barton," answered he, in a voice tremulous with agitation. " My missis is in labour, and, for the love of God, step in while I run for th' doctor, for she's fearful bad."

While the woman hastily dressed herself, leaving the window still open, she heard cries of agony, which resounded in the little court in the stillness of the night. In less than five minutes she was standing by Mrs. Barton's bedside, relieving the terrified Mary, who went about, where she was told, like an automaton; her eyes tearless, her face calm, though deadly pale, and uttering no sound, except when her teeth chattered for very nervousness.

The cries grew worse.

The doctor was very long in hearing the repeated rings at his night-bell, and still longer in understanding who it was that made this sudden call upon his services; and then he begged Barton just to wait while he dressed himself, in order that no time might be lost in finding the court and house. Barton absolutely stamped with impatience, outside the doctor's door, before he came down; and walked so fast homewards, that the medical man several times asked him to go slower.

" Is she so very bad? " asked he.

" Worse, much worser than ever I saw her before," replied John.

No! she was not—she was at peace. The cries were still for ever. John had no time for listening. He opened the latched door, stayed not to light a candle for the mere ceremony of showing his companion up the stairs, so well known to himself; but, in two minutes was in the room, where lay the dead wife, whom he had loved with all the power of his strong heart. The doctor stumbled upstairs by the fire-light, and met the awe-struck look of the neighbour, which at once told him the



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state of things. The room was still, as he, with habitual tip-toe step, approached the poor frail body, whom nothing now could more disturb. Her daughter knelt by the bedside, her face buried in the clothes, which were almost crammed into her mouth, to keep down the choking sobs. The husband stood like one stupefied. The doctor questioned the neighbour in whispers, and then approaching Barton, said, "You must go downstairs. This is a great shock, but bear it like a man. Go down."

He went mechanically and sat down on the first chair. He had no hope. The look of death was too clear upon her face. Still, when he heard one or two unusual noises, the thought burst on him that it might only be a trance, a fit, a—he did not well know what,—but not death! Oh, not death! And he was starting up to go upstairs again, when the doctor's heavy, cautious, creaking footstep was heard on the stairs. Then he knew what it really was in the chamber above.

"Nothing could have saved her—there has been some shock to the system—" and so he went on; but, to unheeding ears, which yet retained his words to ponder on; words not for immediate use in conveying sense, but to be laid by, in the storehouse of memory, for a more convenient season. The doctor seeing the state of the case, grieved for the man; and, very sleepy, thought it best to go, and accordingly wished him good-night—but there was no answer, so he let himself out; and Barton sat on, like a stock or a stone, so rigid, so still. He heard the sounds above too, and knew what they meant. He heard the stiff, unseasoned drawer, in which his wife kept her clothes, pulled open. He saw the neighbour come down, and blunder about in search of soap and water. He knew well what she wanted, and *why* she wanted them, but he did not speak, nor offer to help. At last she went, with some kindly-meant words (a text of comfort, which fell upon a deafened ear), and something about "Mary," but which Mary he could not tell, in his bewildered state.

He tried to realise it, to think it possible. And then his mind wandered off to other days, to far different times. He thought of their courtship; of his first seeing her, an awkward, beautiful rustic, far too shiftless for the delicate factory work to which she was apprenticed; of his first gift to her, a bead necklace, which had long ago been put by, in one of the deep drawers of the dresser, to be kept for Mary. He wondered if it was there yet, and with a strange curiosity he got up to feel for it; for the fire by this time was well-nigh out, and candle he had none.

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His groping hand fell on the piled-up tea things, which at his desire she had left unwashed till morning—they were all so tired. He was reminded of one of the daily little actions, which acquire such power when they have been performed for the last time by one we love. He began to think over his wife's daily round of duties: and something in the remembrance that these would never more be done by her, touched the source of tears, and he cried aloud. Poor Mary, meanwhile, had mechanically helped the neighbour in all the last attentions to the dead; and when she was kissed, and spoken to soothingly, tears stole quietly down her cheeks: but she reserved the luxury of a full burst of grief till she should be alone. She shut the chamber-door softly, after the neighbour had gone, and then shook the bed by which she knelt with her agony of sorrow. She repeated, over and over again, the same words; the same vain, unanswered address to her who was no more. "Oh, mother! mother, are you really dead! Oh, mother, mother!"

At last she stopped, because it flashed across her mind that her violence of grief might disturb her father. All was still below. She looked on the face so changed, and yet so strangely like. She bent down to kiss it. The cold, unyielding flesh struck a shudder to her heart, and hastily obeying her impulse, she grasped the candle, and opened the door. Then she heard the sobs of her father's griefs; and quickly, quietly stealing down the steps, she knelt by him, and kissed his hand. He took no notice at first, for his burst of grief would not be controlled. But when her shriller sobs, her terrified cries (which she could not repress), rose upon his ear, he checked himself.

"Child, we must be all to one another, now *she* is gone," whispered he.

"Oh, father, what can I do for you? Do tell me! I'll do anything."

"I know thou wilt. Thou must not fret thyself ill, that's the first thing I ask. Thou must leave me, and go to bed now, like a good girl as thou art."

"Leave you, father! oh, don't say so."

"Ay, but thou must! thou must go to bed, and try and sleep; thou'lt have enough to do and to bear, poor wench, to-morrow."

Mary got up, kissed her father, and sadly went upstairs to the little closet where she slept. She thought it was of no use undressing, for that she could never, never sleep, so threw herself on her bed in her clothes, and before ten minutes had

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passed away, the passionate grief of youth had subsided into sleep.

Barton had been roused by his daughter's entrance; both from his stupor and from his uncontrollable sorrow. He could think on what was to be done, could plan for the funeral, could calculate the necessity of soon returning to his work, as the extravagance of the past night would leave them short of money, if he long remained away from the mill. He was in a club, so that money was provided for the burial. These things settled in his own mind, he recalled the doctor's words, and bitterly thought of the shock his poor wife had so recently had, in the mysterious disappearance of her cherished sister. His feelings towards Esther almost amounted to curses. It was she who had brought on all this sorrow. Her giddiness, her lightness of conduct, had wrought this woe. His previous thoughts about her had been tinged with wonder and pity, but now he hardened his heart against her for ever.

One of the good influences over John Barton's life had departed that night. One of the ties which bound him down to the gentle humanities of earth was loosened, and henceforward the neighbours all remarked he was a changed man. His gloom and his sternness became habitual instead of occasional. He was more obstinate. But never to Mary. Between the father and the daughter there existed in full force that mysterious bond which unites those who have been loved by one who is now dead and gone. While he was harsh and silent to others, he humoured Mary with tender love; she had more of her own way than is common in any rank with girls of her age. Part of this was the necessity of the case; for, of course, all the money went through her hands, and the household arrangements were guided by her will and pleasure. But part was her father's indulgence, for he left her, with full trust in her unusual sense and spirit, to choose her own associates, and her own times for seeing her associates.

With all this, Mary had not her father's confidence in the matters which now began to occupy him, heart and soul; she was aware that he had joined clubs, and become an active member of the trades' union, but it was hardly likely that a girl of Mary's age (even when two or three years had elapsed since her mother's death) should care much for the differences between the employers and the employed,—an eternal subject for agitation in the manufacturing district, which, however it may be lulled for a time, is sure to break

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forth again with fresh violence at any depression of trade, showing that in its apparent quiet the ashes had still smouldered in the breasts of a few.

Among these few was John Barton. At all times it is a bewildering thing to the poor weaver to see his employer removing from house to house, each one grander than the last, till he ends in building one more magnificent than all, or withdraws his money from the concern, or sells his mill to buy an estate in the country, while all the time the weaver, who thinks he and his fellows are the real makers of this wealth, is struggling on for bread for their children, through the vicissitudes of lowered wages, short hours, fewer hands employed, etc. And when he knows trade is bad, and could understand (at least partially) that there are not buyers enough in the market to purchase the goods already made, and consequently that there is no demand for more; when he would bear and endure much without complaining, could he also see that his employers were bearing their share; he is, I say, bewildered and (to use his own word) "aggravated" to see that all goes on just as usual with the mill-owners. Large houses are still occupied, while spinners' and weavers' cottages stand empty, because the families that once occupied them are obliged to live in rooms or cellars. Carriages still roll along the streets, concerts are still crowded by subscribers, the shops for expensive luxuries still find daily customers, while the workman loiters away his unemployed time in watching these things, and thinking of the pale, uncomplaining wife at home, and the wailing children asking in vain for enough of food, of the sinking health, of the dying life of those near and dear to him. The contrast is too great. Why should he alone suffer from bad times?

I know that this is not really the case; and I know what is the truth in such matters: but what I wish to impress is what the workman feels and thinks. True, that with child-like improvidence, good times will often dissipate his grumbling, and make him forget all prudence and foresight.

But there are earnest men among these people, men who have endured wrongs without complaining, but without ever forgetting or forgiving those whom (they believe) have caused all this woe.

Among these was John Barton. His parents had suffered, his mother had died from absolute want of the necessaries of life. He himself was a good, steady workman, and, as such, pretty certain of steady employment. But he spent all he got with the confidence (you may also call it improvidence) of one

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who was willing, and believed himself able, to supply all his wants by his own exertions. And when his master suddenly failed, and all hands in that mill were turned back, one Tuesday morning, with the news that Mr. Hunter had stopped, Barton had only a few shillings to rely on; but he had good heart of being employed at some other mill, and accordingly, before returning home, he spent some hours in going from factory to factory asking for work. But at every mill was some sign of depression of trade; some were working short hours, some were turning off hands, and for weeks Barton was out of work, living on credit. It was during this time his little son, the apple of his eye, the cynosure of all his strong power of love, fell ill of the scarlet fever. They dragged him through the crisis, but his life hung on a gossamer thread. Everything, the doctor said, depended on good nourishment, on generous living, to keep up the little fellow's strength, in the prostration in which the fever had left him. Mocking words! when the commonest food in the house would not furnish one little meal. Barton tried credit; but it was worn out at the little provision shops, which were now suffering in their turn. He thought it would be no sin to steal, and would have stolen; but he could not get the opportunity in the few days the child lingered. Hungry himself, almost to an animal pitch of ravenousness, but with the bodily pain swallowed up in anxiety for his little sinking lad, he stood at one of the shop windows where all edible luxuries are displayed; haunches of venison, Stilton cheeses, moulds of jelly —all appetising sights to the common passer-by. And out of this shop came Mrs. Hunter! She crossed to her carriage, followed by the shopman loaded with purchases for a party. The door was quickly slammed to, and she drove away; and Barton returned home with a bitter spirit of wrath in his heart, to see his only boy a corpse!

You can fancy, now, the hoards of vengeance in his heart against the employers. For there are never wanting those who, either in speech or in print, find it their interest to cherish such feelings in the working classes; who know how and when to rouse the dangerous power at their command; and who use their knowledge with unrelenting purpose to either party.

So while Mary took her own way, growing more spirited every day, and growing in her beauty too, her father was chairman at many a trades' union meeting; a friend of delegates, and ambitious of being a delegate himself; a Chartist, and ready to do anything for his order.

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But now times were good; and all these feelings were theoretical, not practical. His most practical thought was getting Mary apprenticed to a dressmaker; for he had never left off disliking a factory life for a girl, on more accounts than one.

Mary must do something. The factories being, as I said, out of the question, there were two things open—going out to service, and the dressmaking business; and against the first of these Mary set herself with all the force of her strong will. What that will might have been able to achieve had her father been against her, I cannot tell; but he disliked the idea of parting with her, who was the light of his hearth, the voice of his otherwise silent home. Besides, with his ideas and feelings towards the higher classes, he considered domestic servitude as a species of slavery; a pampering of artificial wants on the one side, a giving-up of every right of leisure by day and quiet rest by night on the other. How far his strong exaggerated feelings had any foundation in truth, it is for you to judge. I am afraid that Mary's determination not to go to service arose from far less sensible thoughts on the subject than her father's. Three years of independence of action (since her mother's death such a time had now elapsed) had little inclined her to submit to rules as to hours and associates, to regulate her dress by a mistress' ideas of propriety, to lose the dear feminine privileges of gossiping with a merry neighbour, and working night and day to help one who was sorrowful. Besides all this, the sayings of her absent, her mysterious aunt, Esther, had an unacknowledged influence over Mary. She knew she was very pretty; the factory people as they poured from the mills, and in their freedom told the truth (whatever it might be) to every passer-by, had early let Mary into the secret of her beauty. If their remarks had fallen on an unheeding ear, there were always young men enough, in a different rank from her own, who were willing to compliment the pretty weaver's daughter as they met her in the streets. Besides, trust a girl of sixteen for knowing well if she is pretty; concerning her plainness she may be ignorant. So with this consciousness she had early determined that her beauty should make her a lady; the rank she coveted the more for her father's abuse; the rank to which she firmly believed her lost Aunt Esther had arrived. Now, while a servant must often drudge and be dirty, must be known as her servant by all who visited at her master's house, a dressmaker's apprentice must (or so Mary thought) be always dressed with a certain regard to appearance; must never soil her hands, and

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need never redden or dirty her face with hard labour. Before my telling you so truly what folly Mary felt or thought injures her without redemption in your opinion, think what are the silly fancies of sixteen years of age in every class, and under all circumstances. The end of all the thoughts of father and daughter was, as I said before, Mary was to be a dressmaker; and her ambition prompted her unwilling father to apply at all the first establishments, to know on what terms of painstaking and zeal his daughter might be admitted into ever so humble a workwoman's situation. But high premiums were asked at all; poor man! he might have known that without giving up a day's work to ascertain the fact. He would have been indignant, indeed, had he known that if Mary had accompanied him the case might have been rather different, as her beauty would have made her desirable as a show-woman. Then he tried second-rate places; at all the payment of a sum of money was necessary, and money he had none. Disheartened and angry he went home at night, declaring it was time lost; that dressmaking was at all events a toilsome business, and not worth learning. Mary saw that the grapes were sour, and the next day she set out herself, as her father could not afford to lose another day's work; and before night (as yesterday's experience had considerably lowered her ideas) she had engaged herself as apprentice (so called, though there were no deeds or indentures to the bond) to a certain Miss Simmonds, milliner and dressmaker, in a respectable little street leading off Ardwick Green, where her business was duly announced in gold letters on a black ground, enclosed in a bird's-eye maple frame, and stuck in the front parlour window; where the workwomen were called "her young ladies;" and where Mary was to work for two years without any remuneration, on consideration of being taught the business; and where afterwards she was to dine and have tea, with a small quarterly salary (paid quarterly because so much more genteel than by week), a *very* small one, divisible into a minute weekly pittance. In summer she was to be there by six, bringing her day's meals during the first two years; in winter she was not to come till after breakfast. Her time for returning home at night must always depend upon the quantity of work Miss Simmonds had to do.

And Mary was satisfied; and seeing this, her father was contented too, although his words were grumbling and morose; but Mary knew his ways, and coaxed and planned for the future so cheerily, that both went to bed with easy if not happy hearts.

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## CHAPTER IV

"To envy nought beneath the ample sky;
To mourn no evil deed, no hour mis-spent;
And, like a living violet, silently
Return in sweets to Heaven what goodness lent,
Then bend beneath the chastening shower content."

ELLIOTT.

ANOTHER year passed on. The waves of time seemed long since to have swept away all trace of poor Mary Barton. But her husband still thought of her, although with a calm and quiet grief, in the silent watches of the night: and Mary would start from her hard-earned sleep, and think in her half-dreamy, half-awakened state she saw her mother stand by her bedside, as she used to do "in the days of long ago;" with a shaded candle and an expression of ineffable tenderness, while she looked on her sleeping child. But Mary rubbed her eyes and sank back on her pillow, awake, and knowing it was a dream; and still, in all her troubles and perplexities, her heart called on her mother for aid, and she thought, "If mother had but lived, she would have helped me." Forgetting that the woman's sorrows are far more difficult to mitigate than a child's, even by the mighty power of a mother's love; and unconscious of the fact that she was far superior in sense and spirit to the mother she mourned. Aunt Esther was still mysteriously absent, and people had grown weary of wondering and began to forget. Barton still attended his club, and was an active member of a trades' union; indeed, more frequently than ever, since the time of Mary's return in the evening was so uncertain; and as she occasionally, in very busy times, remained all night. His chiefest friend was still George Wilson, although they had no great sympathy on the questions that agitated Barton's mind. Still their hearts were bound by old ties to one another, and the remembrance of former times gave an unspoken charm to their meetings. Our old friend, the cub-like lad, Jem Wilson, had shot up into a powerful, well-made young man, with a sensible face enough; nay, a face that might have been handsome, had it not been here and there marked by the small-pox. He worked with one of the great firms of engineers, who send from out their towns of workshops engines and machinery to the dominions of the Czar and the Sultan. His father and mother

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were never weary of praising Jem, at all which commendation pretty Mary Barton would toss her head, seeing clearly enough that they wished her to understand what a good husband he would make, and to favour his love, about which he never dared to speak, whatever eyes and looks revealed.

One day, in the early winter time, when people were provided with warm substantial gowns, not likely soon to wear out, and when, accordingly, business was rather slack at Miss Simmonds', Mary met Alice Wilson coming home from her half-day's work at some tradesman's house. Mary and Alice had always liked each other; indeed, Alice looked with particular interest on the motherless girl, the daughter of her whose forgiving kiss had so comforted in many sleepless hours. So there was a warm greeting between the tidy old woman and the blooming young work-girl; and then Alice ventured to ask if she would come in and take her tea with her that very evening.

"You'll think it dull enough to come just to sit with an old woman like me, but there's a tidy young lass as lives in the floor above, who does plain work, and now and then a bit in your own line, Mary; she's granddaughter to old Job Legh, a spinner, and a good girl she is. Do come, Mary, I've a terrible wish to make you known to each other. She's a genteel-looking lass, too."

At the beginning of this speech Mary had feared the intended visitor was to be no other than Alice's nephew; but Alice was too delicate-minded to plan a meeting, even for her dear Jem, when one would have been an unwilling party; and Mary, relieved from her apprehension by the conclusion, gladly agreed to come. How busy Alice felt! it was not often she had any one to tea; and now her sense of the duties of a hostess were almost too much for her. She made haste home, and lighted the unwilling fire, borrowing a pair of bellows to make it burn the faster. For herself she was always patient, she let the coals take their time. Then she put on her pattens, and went to fill her kettle at the pump in the next court, and on her way she borrowed a cup; of odd saucers she had plenty, serving as plates when occasion required. Half an ounce of tea and a quarter of a pound of butter went far to absorb her morning's wages; but this was an unusual occasion. In general, she used herb-tea for herself, when at home, unless some thoughtful mistress made her a present of tea-leaves from her more abundant household. The two chairs drawn out for visitors, and duly swept and dusted; an old board arranged with some skill upon two old

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candle-boxes set on end (rather rickety to be sure, but she knew the seat of old, and when to sit lightly; indeed the whole affair was more for apparent dignity of position than for any real ease); a little, very little round table, put just before the fire, which by this time was blazing merrily; her unlackered, ancient, third hand tea-tray arranged with a black tea-pot, two cups with a red and white pattern, and one with the old friendly willow pattern, and saucers, not to match (on one of the extra supply, the lump of butter flourished away); all these preparations complete, Alice began to look about her with satisfaction, and a sort of wonder what more could be done to add to the comfort of the evening. She took one of the chairs away from its appropriate place by the table, and putting it close to the broad large hanging shelf I told you about when I first described her cellar-dwelling, and mounting on it, she pulled towards her an old deal box, and took thence a quantity of the oat bread of the north, the clap-bread of Cumberland and Westmoreland, and descending carefully with the thin cakes threatening to break to pieces in her hand, she placed them on the bare table, with the belief that her visitors would have an unusual treat in eating the bread of her childhood. She brought out a good piece of a four-pound loaf of common household bread as well, and then sat down to rest, really to rest, and not to pretend, on one of the rush-bottomed chairs. The candle was ready to be lighted, the kettle boiled, the tea was awaiting its doom in its paper parcel; all was ready.

A knock at the door! It was Margaret, the young work-woman who lived in the rooms above, who having heard the bustle, and the subsequent quiet, began to think it was time to pay her visit below. She was a sallow, unhealthy, sweet-looking young woman, with a careworn look; her dress was humble and very simple, consisting of some kind of dark stuff gown, her neck being covered by a drab shawl or large handkerchief, pinned down behind and at the sides in front. The old woman gave her a hearty greeting, and made her sit down on the chair she had just left, while she balanced herself on the board seat, in order that Margaret might think it was quite her free and independent choice to sit there.

"I cannot think what keeps Mary Barton. She's quite grand with her late hours," said Alice, as Mary still delayed.

The truth was, Mary was dressing herself; yes, to come to poor old Alice's—she thought it worth while to consider what gown she should put on. It was not for Alice, however, you

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may be pretty sure; no, they knew each other too well. But Mary liked making an impression, and in this it must be owned she was pretty often gratified—and there was this strange girl to consider just now. So she put on her pretty new blue merino, made tight to her throat, her little linen collar and linen cuffs, and sallied forth to impress poor gentle Margaret. She certainly succeeded. Alice, who never thought much about beauty, had never told Margaret how pretty Mary was; and, as she came in half-blushing at her own self-consciousness, Margaret could hardly take her eyes off her, and Mary put down her long black lashes with a sort of dislike of the very observation she had taken such pains to secure. Can you fancy the bustle of Alice to make the tea, to pour it out, and sweeten it to their liking, to help and help again to clap-bread and bread-and-butter? Can you fancy the delight with which she watched her piled-up clap-bread disappear before the hungry girls, and listened to the praises of her home-remembered dainty?

"My mother used to send me some clap-bread by any north-country person—bless her! She knew how good such things taste when far away from home. Not but what every one likes it. When I was in service my fellow-servants were always glad to share with me. Eh, it's a long time ago, yon."

"Do tell us about it, Alice," said Margaret.

"Why, lass, there's nothing to tell. There was more mouths at home than could be fed. Tom, that's Will's father (you don't know Will, but he's a sailor to foreign parts), had come to Manchester, had sent word what terrible lots of work was to be had, both for lads and lasses. So father sent George first (you know George, well enough, Mary), and then work was scarce out toward Burton, where we lived, and father said I maun try and get a place. And George wrote as how wages were far higher in Manchester than Milnthorpe or Lancaster; and, lasses, I was young and thoughtless, and thought it was a fine thing to go so far from home. So, one day, th' butcher he brings us a letter fra George, to say he'd heard on a place—and I was all agog to go, and father was pleased, like; but mother said little, and that little was very quiet. I've often thought she was a bit hurt to see me so ready to go—God forgive me! But she packed up my clothes, and some o' the better end of her own as would fit me, in yon little paper box up there—it's good for naught now, but I would liefer live without fire than break it up to be burnt; and yet it's going on for eighty years old, for she had it when she was a girl, and brought all her clothes in it

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to father's, when they were married. But, as I was saying, she did not cry, though the tears was often in her eyes; and I seen her looking after me down the lane as long as I were in sight, with her hand shading her eyes—and that were the last look I ever had on her."

Alice knew that before long she should go to that mother; and, besides, the griefs and bitter woes of youth have worn themselves out before we grow old; but she looked so sorrowful that the girls caught her sadness, and mourned for the poor woman who had been dead and gone so many years ago.

"Did you never see her again, Alice? Did you never go home while she was alive?" asked Mary.

"No, nor since. Many a time and oft have I planned to go. I plan it yet, and hope to go home again before it please God to take me. I used to try and save money enough to go for a week when I was in service; but first one thing came, and then another. First, missis's children fell ill of the measles, just when the week I'd asked for came, and I couldn't leave them, for one and all cried for me to nurse them. Then missis herself fell sick, and I could go less than ever. For, you see, they kept a little shop, and he drank, and missis and me was all there was to mind children, and shop, and all, and cook and wash besides."

Mary was glad she had not gone into service, and said so.

"Eh, lass! thou little knows the pleasure o' helping others; I was as happy there as could be; almost as happy as I was at home. Well, but next year I thought I could go at a leisure time, and missis telled me I should have a fortnight then, and I use to sit up all that winter working hard at patchwork, to have a quilt of my own making to take to my mother. But master died, and missis went away fra Manchester, and I'd to look out for a place again."

"Well, but," interrupted Mary, "I should have thought that was the best time to go home."

"No, I thought not. You see it was a different thing going home for a week on a visit, may be with money in my pocket to give father a lift, to going home to be a burden to him. Besides, how could I hear o' a place there. Anyways I thought it best to stay, though perhaps it might have been better to ha' gone, for then I should ha' seen mother again;" and the poor old woman looked puzzled.

"I'm sure you did what you thought right," said Margaret, gently.

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"Ay, lass, that's it," said Alice, raising her head and speaking more cheerfully. "That's the thing, and then let the Lord send what he sees fit; not but that I grieved sore, oh, sore and sad, when toward spring next year, when my quilt were all done to th' lining, George came in one evening to tell me mother was dead. I cried many a night at after;[1] I'd no time for crying by day, for that missis was terrible strict; she would not hearken to my going to the funeral; and indeed I would have been too late, for George set off that very night by th' coach, and the letter had been kept or summut (posts were not like the posts now-a-days), and he found the burial all over, and father talking o' flitting; for he could not abide the cottage after mother was gone."

"Was it a pretty place?" asked Mary.

"Pretty, lass! I never seed such a bonny bit anywhere. You see there are hills there as seem to go up into the skies, not near may be, but that makes them all the bonnier. I used to think they were the golden hills of heaven, about which my mother sang when I was a child,

'Yon are the golden hills o' heaven,
Where ye sall never win.'

Something about a ship and a lover that should hae been na lover, the ballad was. Well, and near our cottage were rocks. Eh, lasses! ye don't know what rocks are in Manchester! Grey pieces o' stone as large as a house, all covered over wi' moss of different colours, some yellow, some brown; and the ground beneath them knee-deep in purple heather, smelling sae sweet and fragrant, and the low music of the humming-bee for ever sounding among it. Mother used to send Sally and me out to gather ling and heather for besoms, and it was such pleasant work! We used to come home of an evening loaded so as you could not see us, for all that it was so light to carry. And then mother would make us sit down under the old hawthorn tree (where we used to make our house among the great roots as stood above the ground), to pick and tie up the heather. It seems all like yesterday, and yet it's a long long time agone. Poor sister Sally has been in her grave this forty year and more. But I often wonder if the hawthorn is standing yet, and if the lasses still go to gather heather, as we did many and many a year past and gone. I sicken at heart to see the old spot once again. May be next summer I may set off, if God spares me to see next summer."

[1] A common Lancashire phrase.

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"Why have you never been in all these many years?" asked Mary.

"Why lass! first one wanted me, and then another; and I could not go without money either, and I got very poor at times. Tom was a scapegrace, poor fellow, and always wanted help of one kind or another; and his wife (for I think scapegraces are always married long before steady folk) was but a helpless kind of body. She were always ailing, and he were always in trouble; so I had enough to do with my hands and my money too, for that matter. They died within twelvemonth of each other, leaving one lad (they had had seven, but the Lord had taken six to himself), Will, as I was telling you on; and I took him myself, and left service to make a bit on a home-place for him, and a fine lad he was, the very spit of his father as to looks, only steadier. For he was steady, although nought would serve him but going to sea. I tried all I could to set him again a sailor's life. Says I, 'Folks is as sick as dogs all the time they're at sea. Your own mother telled me (for she came from foreign parts, being a Manx woman) that she'd ha' thanked any one for throwing her into the water." Nay, I sent him a' the way to Runcorn by the Duke's canal, that he might know what the sea were; and I looked to see him come back as white as a sheet wi' vomiting. But the lad went on to Liverpool and saw real ships, and came back more set than ever on being a sailor, and he said as how he had never been sick at all, and thought he could stand the sea pretty well. So I telled him he mun do as he liked; and he thanked me and kissed me, for all I was very frabbit[1] with him; and now he's gone to South America, at t'other side of the sun, they tell me."

Mary stole a glance at Margaret to see what she thought of Alice's geography; but Margaret looked so quiet and demure that Mary was in doubt if she were not really ignorant. Not that Mary's knowledge was very profound, but she had seen a terrestrial globe, and knew where to find France and the continents on a map.

After this long talking Alice seemed lost for a time in reverie; and the girls, respecting her thoughts, which they suspected had wandered to the home and scenes of her childhood, were silent. All at once she recalled her duties as hostess, and by an effort brought back her mind to the present time.

"Margaret, thou must let Mary hear thee sing. I don't know about fine music myself, but folks say Margaret is a rare

[1] "Frabbit," peevish.

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singer, and I know she can make me cry at any time by singing 'The Owdham Weaver.' Do sing that, Margaret, there's a good lass."

With a faint smile, as if amused at Alice's choice of a song, Margaret began.

Do you know "The Oldham Weaver?" Not unless you are Lancashire born and bred, for it is a complete Lancashire ditty. I will copy it for you.

THE OLDHAM WEAVER

I

Oi'm a poor cotton-weyver, as mony a one knoowas,
Oi've nowt for t' yeat, an oi've woorn eawt my clooas,
Yo'ad hardly gi' tuppence for aw as oi've on,
My clogs are boath brosten, and stuckins oi've none,
Yo'd think it wur hard,
To be browt into th' warld,
To be—clemmed,[1] an do th' best as yo con.

II

Owd Dicky o' Billy's kept telling me lung,
Wee s'd ha' better toimes if I'd but howd my tung,
Oi've howden my tung, till oi've near stopped my breath,
Oi think i' my heeart oi'se soon clem to deeath,
Owd Dicky's weel crammed,
He never wur clemmed,
An' he ne'er picked ower[2] i' his loife.

III

We tow'rt on six week—thinking aitch day wur th' last,
We shifted, an' shifted, till neaw we're quoite fast;
We lived upo' nettles, whoile nettles wur good,
An' Waterloo porridge the best o' eawr food,
Oi'm tellin' yo' true,
Oi can find folk enow,
As wur livin' na better nor me.

IV

Owd Billy o' Dans sent th' baileys one day,
Fur a shop deebt oi eawd him, as oi could na pay,
But he wur too lat, fur owd Billy o' th' Bent,
Had sowd th' tit an' cart, an' ta'en goods fur th' rent,
We'd neawt left bo' th' owd stoo',
That wur seeats fur two,
An' on it ceawred Marget an' me.

V

Then t' baileys leuked reawnd as sloy as a meawse,
When they seed as aw t' goods were ta'en eawt o' t' heawse,
Says one chap to th' tother, "Aws gone, theaw may see;"
Says oi, "Ne'er freet, mon, yeaur welcome ta' me."
They made no moor ado
But whopped up th' eawd stoo',
An' we booath leet, whack—upo' t' flags!

[1] "Clem," to starve with hunger. "Hard is the choice, when the valiant must eat their arms or *clem*."—*Ben Jonson*.

[2] To "pick ower" means to throw the shuttle in hand-loom weaving.

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VI

Then oi said to eawr Marget, as we lay upo' t' floor,
" We's never be lower i' this warld, oi'm sure,
If ever things awtern, oi'm sure they mun mend,
For oi think i' my heart we're booath at t' far eend;
For meeat we ha' none;
Nor looms t' weyve on,—
Edad! they're as good lost as fund."

VII

Eawr Marget declares had hoo cloo'as to put on,
Hoo'd goo up to Lunnon an' talk to th' greet mon;
An' if things were na awtered when there hoo had been,
Hoo's fully resolved t' sew up meawth an' eend;
Hoo's neawt to say again t' king,
But hoo loikes a fair thing,
An' hoo says hoo can tell when hoo's hurt.

The air to which this is sung is a kind of droning recitative, depending much on expression and feeling. To read it, it may, perhaps, seem humorous; but it is that humour which is near akin to pathos, and to those who have seen the distress it describes, it is a powerfully pathetic song. Margaret had both witnessed the destitution, and had the heart to feel it; and withal, her voice was of that rich and rare order, which does not require any great compass of notes to make itself appreciated. Alice had her quiet enjoyment of tears. But Margaret, with fixed eye, and earnest, dreamy look, seemed to become more and more absorbed in realising to herself the woe she had been describing, and which she felt might at that very moment be suffering and hopeless within a short distance of their comparative comfort.

Suddenly she burst forth with all the power of her magnificent voice, as if a prayer from her very heart for all who were in distress, in the grand supplication, " Lord remember David." Mary held her breath, unwilling to lose a note, it was so clear, so perfect, so imploring. A far more correct musician than Mary might have paused with equal admiration of the really scientific knowledge, with which the poor depressed-looking young needle-woman used her superb and flexile voice. Deborah Travers herself (once an Oldham factory girl, and afterwards the darling of fashionable crowds as Mrs. Knyvett), might have owned a sister in her art.

She stopped; and with tears of holy sympathy in her eyes, Alice thanked the songstress, who resumed her calm, demure manner, much to Mary's wonder, for she looked at her unweariedly, as if surprised that the hidden power should not be perceived in the outward appearance.



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When Alice's little speech of thanks was over, there was quiet enough to hear a fine, though rather quavering, male voice, going over again one or two strains of Margaret's song.

"That's grandfather!" exclaimed she. "I must be going, for he said he should not be at home till past nine."

"Well, I'll not say nay, for I have to be up by four for a very heavy wash at Mrs. Simpson's; but I shall be terrible glad to see you again at any time, lasses; and I hope you'll take to one another."

As the girls ran up the cellar steps together, Margaret said: "Just step in, and see grandfather. I should like him to see you."

And Mary consented.

## CHAPTER V

"Learned he was; nor bird, nor insect flew,
But he its leafy home and history knew;
Nor wild-flower decked the rock, nor moss the well,
But he its name and qualities could tell."

ELLIOTT.

THERE is a class of men in Manchester, unknown even to many of the inhabitants, and whose existence will probably be doubted by many, who yet may claim kindred with all the noble names that science recognises. I said "in Manchester," but they are scattered all over the manufacturing districts of Lancashire. In the neighbourhood of Oldham there are weavers, common hand-loom weavers, who throw the shuttle with unceasing sound, though Newton's *Principia* lie open on the loom, to be snatched at in work hours, but revelled over in meal times, or at night. Mathematical problems are received with interest, and studied with absorbing attention by many a broad-spoken, common-looking factory-hand. It is perhaps less astonishing that the more popularly interesting branches of natural history have their warm and devoted followers among this class. There are botanists among them, equally familiar with either the Linnæan or the Natural system, who know the name and habitat of every plant within a day's walk from their dwellings; who steal the holiday of a day or two when any particular plant should be in flower, and tying up their simple food in their pocket-handkerchiefs, set off with single purpose to fetch home the humble-looking weed. There are entomologists, who may

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be seen with a rude-looking net, ready to catch any winged insect, or a kind of dredge, with which they rake the green and slimy pools; practical, shrewd, hard-working men, who pore over every new specimen with real scientific delight. Nor is it the common and more obvious divisions of entomology and botany that alone attract these earnest seekers after knowledge. Perhaps it may be owing to the great annual town-holiday of Whitsun-week so often falling in May or June, that the two great beautiful families of Ephemeridæ and Phryganidæ have been so much and so closely studied by Manchester workmen, while they have in a great measure escaped general observation. If you will refer to the preface to Sir J. E. Smith's Life (I have it not by me, or I would copy you the exact passage), you will find that he names a little circumstance corroborative of what I have said. Sir J. E. Smith, being on a visit to Roscoe, of Liverpool, made some inquiries from him as to the habitat of a very rare plant, said to be found in certain places in Lancashire. Mr. Roscoe knew nothing of the plant; but stated that if any one could give him the desired information, it would be a hand-loom weaver in Manchester, whom he named. Sir J. E. Smith proceeded by coach to Manchester, and on arriving at that town, he inquired of the porter who was carrying his luggage, if he could direct him to So and So.

"Oh, yes," replied the man. "He does a bit in my way;" and, on further investigation, it turned out that both the porter and his friend the weaver were skilful botanists, and able to give Sir J. E. Smith the very information which he wanted.

Such are the tastes and pursuits of some of the thoughtful, little understood working men of Manchester.

And Margaret's grandfather was one of these. He was a little wiry-looking old man, who moved with a jerking motion, as if his limbs were worked by a string like a child's toy, with dun-coloured hair lying thin and soft at the back and sides of his head; his forehead was so large it seemed to overbalance the rest of his face, which had indeed lost its natural contour by the absence of all the teeth. The eyes absolutely gleamed with intelligence; so keen, so observant, you felt as if they were almost wizard-like. Indeed, the whole room looked not unlike a wizard's dwelling. Instead of pictures were hung rude wooden frames of impaled insects; the little table was covered with cabalistic books; and a case of mysterious instruments lay beside, one of which Job Legh was using when his granddaughter entered.

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On her appearance he pushed his spectacles up so as to rest midway on his forehead, and gave Mary a short, kind welcome. But Margaret he caressed as a mother caresses her first-born; stroking her with tenderness, and almost altering his voice as he spoke to her.

Mary looked round on the odd, strange things she had never seen at home, and which seemed to her to have a very uncanny look.

"Is your grandfather a fortune-teller?" whispered she to her new friend.

"No," replied Margaret, in the same voice; "but you're not the first as has taken him for such. He is only fond of such things as most folks know nothing about."

"And do you know aught about them too?"

"I know a bit about some of the things grandfather is fond on; just because he's fond on 'em, I tried to learn about them."

"What things are these?" said Mary, struck with the weird-looking creatures that sprawled around the room in their roughly-made glass cases.

But she was not prepared for the technical names which Job Legh pattered down on her ear, on which they fell like hail on a skylight; and the strange language only bewildered her more than ever. Margaret saw the state of the case, and came to the rescue.

"Look, Mary, at this horrid scorpion. He gave me such a fright: I am all of a twitter yet when I think of it. Grandfather went to Liverpool one Whitsun-week to go strolling about the docks and pick up what he could from the sailors, who often bring some queer thing or another from the hot countries they go to; and so he sees a chap with a bottle in his hand, like a druggist's physic-bottle; and says grandfather, 'What have ye gotten there?' So the sailor holds it up, and grandfather knew it was a rare kind o' scorpion, not common even in the East Indies where the man came from; and says he, 'How did ye catch this fine fellow, for he wouldn't be taken for nothing I'm thinking?' And the man said as how when they were unloading the ship he'd found him lying behind a bag of rice, and he thought the cold had killed him, for he was not squashed nor injured a bit. He did not like to part with any of the spirit out of his grog to put the scorpion in, but slipped him into the bottle, knowing there were folks enow who would give him something for him. So grandfather gives him a shilling."

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"Two shillings," interrupted Job Legh, "and a good bargain it was."

"Well! grandfather came home as proud as Punch, and pulled the bottle out of his pocket. But you see th' scorpion were doubled up, and grandfather thought I couldn't fairly see how big he was. So he shakes him out right before the fire; and a good warm one it was, for I was ironing, I remember. I left off ironing and stooped down over him, to look at him better, and grandfather got a book, and began to read how this very kind were the most poisonous and vicious species, how their bite were often fatal, and then went on to read how people who were bitten got swelled, and screamed with pain. I was listening hard, but as it fell out, I never took my eyes off the creature, though I could not ha' told I was watching it. Suddenly it seemed to give a jerk, and before I could speak it gave another, and in a minute it was as wild as could be, running at me just like a mad dog."

"What did you do?" asked Mary.

"Me! why, I jumped first on a chair, and then on all the things I'd been ironing on the dresser, and I screamed for grandfather to come up by me, but he did not hearken to me."

"Why, if I'd come up by thee, who'd ha' caught the creature, I should like to know?"

"Well, I begged grandfather to crush it, and I had the iron right over it once, ready to drop, but grandfather begged me not to hurt it in that way. So I couldn't think what he'd have, for he hopped round the room as if he were sore afraid, for all he begged me not to injure it. At last he goes to th' kettle, and lifts up the lid, and peeps in. What on earth is he doing that for, thinks I; he'll never drink his tea with a scorpion running free and easy about the room. Then he takes the tongs, and he settles his spectacles on his nose, and in a minute he had lifted the creature up by th' leg, and dropped him into the boiling water."

"And did that kill him?" said Mary.

"Ay, sure enough; he boiled for longer time than grandfather liked though. But I was so afeard of his coming round again. I ran to the public-house for some gin, and grandfather filled the bottle, and then we poured off the water, and picked him out of the kettle, and dropped him into the bottle, and he were there above a twelvemonth."

"What brought him to life at first?" asked Mary.

"Why, you see, he were never really dead, only torpid—

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that is, dead asleep with the cold, and our good fire brought him round."

"I'm glad father does not care for such things," said Mary.

"Are you! Well, I'm often downright glad grandfather is so fond of his books, and his creatures, and his plants. It does my heart good to see him so happy, sorting them all at home, and so ready to go in search of more, whenever he's a spare day. Look at him now! he's gone back to his books, and he'll be as happy as a king, working away till I make him go to bed. It keeps him silent, to be sure; but so long as I see him earnest, and pleased, and eager, what does that matter? Then, when he has his talking bouts, you can't think how much he has to say. Dear grandfather! you don't know how happy we are!"

Mary wondered if the dear grandfather heard all this, for Margaret did not speak in an undertone; but no! he was far too deep and eager in solving a problem. He did not even notice Mary's leave-taking, and she went home with the feeling that she had that night made the acquaintance of two of the strangest people she ever saw in her life. Margaret, so quiet, so commonplace, until her singing powers were called forth; so silent from home, so cheerful and agreeable at home; and her grandfather so very different to any one Mary had ever seen. Margaret had said he was not a fortune-teller, but she did not know whether to believe her.

To resolve her doubts, she told the history of the evening to her father, who was interested by her account, and curious to see and judge for himself. Opportunities are not often wanting where inclination goes before, and before the end of that winter Mary looked upon Margaret almost as an old friend. The latter would bring her work when Mary was likely to be at home in the evenings and sit with her; and Job Legh would put a book and his pipe in his pocket and just step round the corner to fetch his grand-child, ready for a talk if he found Barton in; ready to pull out pipe and book if the girls wanted him to wait, and John was still at his club. In short, ready to do whatever would give pleasure to his darling Margaret.

I do not know what points of resemblance (or dissimilitude, for the one joins people as often as the other) attracted the two girls to each other. Margaret had the great charm of possessing good strong common sense, and do you not perceive how involuntarily this is valued? It's so pleasant to have a friend who possesses the power of setting a difficult question in a clear light; whose judgment can tell what is best to be done;

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and who is so convinced of what is "wisest, best," that in consideration of the end, all difficulties in the way diminish. People admire talent, and talk about their admiration. But they value common sense without talking about it, and often without knowing it.

So Mary and Margaret grew in love one toward the other; and Mary told many of her feelings in a way she had never done before to any one. Most of her foibles also were made known to Margaret, but not all. There was one cherished weakness still concealed from every one. It concerned a lover, not beloved, but favoured by fancy. A gallant, handsome young man; but —not beloved. Yet Mary hoped to meet him every day in her walks, blushed when she heard his name, and tried to think of him as her future husband, and above all, tried to think of herself as his future wife. Alas! poor Mary! Bitter woe did thy weakness work thee.

She had other lovers. One or two would gladly have kept her company, but she held herself too high, they said. Jem Wilson said nothing, but loved on and on, ever more fondly; he hoped against hope; he would not give up, for it seemed like giving up life to give up thought of Mary. He did not dare to look to any end of all this; the present, so that he saw her, touched the hem of her garment, was enough. Surely, in time, such deep love would beget love.

He would not relinquish hope, and yet her coldness of manner was enough to daunt any man; and it made Jem more despairing than he would acknowledge for a long time even to himself.

But one evening he came round by Barton's house, a willing messenger for his father, and opening the door saw Margaret sitting asleep before the fire. She had come in to speak to Mary; and worn out by a long working, watching night, she fell asleep in the genial warmth.

An old-fashioned saying about a pair of gloves came into Jem's mind, and stepping gently up, he kissed Margaret with a friendly kiss.

She awoke, and perfectly understanding the thing, she said, "For shame of yourself, Jem. What would Mary say?"

Lightly said, lightly answered.

"She'd nobbut say, practice makes perfect." And they both laughed. But the words Margaret had said rankled in Jem's mind. Would Mary care? Would she care in the very least? They seemed to call for an answer by night, and by day; and Jem felt that his heart told him Mary was quite indifferent

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to any action of his. Still he loved on, and on, ever more fondly.

Mary's father was well aware of the nature of Jem Wilson's feelings for his daughter, but he took no notice of them to any one, thinking Mary full young yet for the cares of married life, and unwilling, too, to entertain the idea of parting with her at any time, however distant. But he welcomed Jem at his house, as he would have done his father's son, whatever were his motives for coming; and now and then admitted the thought, that Mary might do worse when her time came than marry Jem Wilson, a steady workman at a good trade, a good son to his parents, and a fine manly spirited chap—at least when Mary was not by: for when she was present he watched her too closely, and too anxiously, to have much of what John Barton called "spunk" in him.

It was towards the end of February, in that year, and a bitter black frost had lasted for many weeks. The keen east wind had long since swept the streets clean, though on a gusty day the dust would rise like pounded ice, and make people's faces quite smart with the cold force with which it blew against them. Houses, sky, people, and everything looked as if a gigantic brush had washed them all over with a dark shade of Indian ink. There was some reason for this grimy appearance on human beings, whatever there might be for the dun looks of the landscape; for soft water had become an article not even to be purchased; and the poor washerwomen might be seen vainly trying to procure a little by breaking the thick grey ice that coated the ditches and ponds in the neighbourhood. People prophesied a long continuance to this already lengthened frost; said the spring would be very late; no spring fashions required; no summer clothing purchased for a short uncertain summer. Indeed there was no end to the evil prophesied during the continuance of that bleak east wind.

Mary hurried home one evening, just as daylight was fading, from Miss Simmonds', with her shawl held up to her mouth, and her head bent as if in deprecation of the meeting wind. So she did not perceive Margaret till she was close upon her at the very turning into the court.

"Bless me, Margaret! is that you? Where are you bound to?"

"To nowhere but your own house (that is, if you'll take me in). I've a job of work to finish to-night; mourning, as must be in time for the funeral to-morrow; and grandfather has been out moss-hunting, and will not be home till late."

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"Oh, how charming it will be. I'll help you if you're backward. Have you much to do?"

"Yes, I only got the order yesterday at noon; and there's three girls beside the mother; and what with trying on and matching the stuff (for there was not enough in the piece they chose first), I'm above a bit behindhand. I've the skirts all to make; I kept that work till candlelight; and the sleeves, to say nothing of little bits to the bodies; for the missis is very particular, and I could scarce keep from smiling while they were crying so, really taking on sadly I'm sure, to hear first one and then t'other clear up to notice the sit of her gown. They weren't to be misfits I promise you, though they were in such trouble."

"Well, Margaret, you're right welcome as you know, and I'll sit down and help you with pleasure, though I was tired enough of sewing to-night at Miss Simmonds'."

By this time Mary had broken up the raking coal, and lighted her candle; and Margaret settled herself to her work on one side of the table, while her friend hurried over her tea at the other. The things were then lifted *en masse* to the dresser; and dusting her side of the table with the apron she always wore at home, Mary took up some breadths and began to run them together.

"Who's it all for, for if you told me I've forgotten?"

"Why for Mrs. Ogden as keeps the greengrocer's shop in Oxford Road. He husband drank himself to death, and though she cried over him and his ways all the time he was alive, she's fretted sadly for him now he's dead."

"Has he left her much to go upon?" asked Mary, examining the texture of the dress. "This is beautifully fine soft bombazine."

"No, I'm much afeard there's but little, and there's several young children, besides the three Miss Ogdens."

"I should have thought girls like them would ha' made their own gowns," observed Mary.

"So I dare say they do, many a one, but now they seem all so busy getting ready for the funeral; for it's to be quite a grand affair, well-nigh twenty people to breakfast, as one of the little ones told me; the little thing seemed to like the fuss, and I do believe it comforted poor Mrs. Ogden to make all the piece o' work. Such a smell of ham boiling and fowls roasting while I waited in the kitchen; it seemed more like a wedding nor[1] a

[1] "Nor," generally used in Lancashire for "than."
"They had lever sleep *nor* be in laundery."—*Dunbar.*

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funeral. They said she'd spend a matter o' sixty pound on th' burial."

"I thought you said she was but badly off," said Mary.

"Ay, I know she's asked for credit at several places, saying her husband laid hands on every farthing he could get for drink. But th' undertakers urge her on you see, and tell her this thing's usual, and that thing's only a common mark of respect, and that everybody has t'other thing, till the poor woman has no will o' her own. I daresay, too, her heart strikes her (it always does when a person's gone) for many a word and many a slighting deed to him, who's stiff and cold; and she thinks to make up matters, as it were, by a grand funeral, though she and all her children, too, may have to pinch many a year to pay the expenses, if ever they pay them at all."

"This mourning, too, will cost a pretty penny," said Mary. "I often wonder why folks wear mourning; it's not pretty or becoming; and it costs a deal of money just when people can spare it least; and if what the Bible tells us be true, we ought not to be sorry when a friend, who's been good, goes to his rest; and as for a bad man, one's glad enough to get shut [1] on him. I cannot see what good comes out o' wearing mourning."

"I'll tell you what I think th' fancy was sent for (Old Alice calls everything 'sent for,' and I believe she's right). It does do good, though not as much as it costs, that I do believe, in setting people (as is cast down by sorrow and feels themselves unable to settle to anything but crying) something to do. Why now I told you how they were grieving; for, perhaps, he was a kind husband and father, in his thoughtless way, when he wasn't in liquor. But they cheered up wonderful while I was there, and I asked 'em for more directions than usual, that they might have something to talk over and fix about; and I left 'em my fashion-book (though it were two months old) just a purpose."

"I don't think every one would grieve a that way. Old Alice wouldn't."

"Old Alice is one in a thousand. I doubt, too, if she would fret much, however sorry she might be. She would say it were sent, and fall to trying to find out what good it were to do. Every sorrow in her mind is sent for good. Did I ever tell you, Mary, what she said one day when she found me taking on about something?"

"No, do tell me. What were you fretting about, first place?"

[1] "Shut," quit.

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"I can't tell you just now; perhaps I may some time."

"When?"

"Perhaps this very evening, if it rises in my heart; perhaps never. It's a fear that sometimes I can't abide to think about, and sometimes I don't like to think on anything else. Well, I was fretting about this fear, and Alice comes in for something, and finds me crying. I would not tell her no more than I would you, Mary; so she says, 'Well, dear, you must mind this, when you're going to fret and be low about anything. "An anxious mind is never a holy mind."' Oh, Mary, I have so often checked my grumbling sin'[1] she said that."

The weary sound of stitching was the only sound heard for a little while, till Mary inquired,

"Do you expect to get paid for this mourning?"

"Why I do not much think I shall. I've thought it over once or twice, and I mean to bring myself to think I shan't, and to like to do it as my bit towards comforting them. I don't think they can pay, and yet they're just the sort of folk to have their minds easier for wearing mourning. There's only one thing I dislike making black for, it does so hurt the eyes."

Margaret put down her work with a sigh, and shaded her eyes. Then she assumed a cheerful tone, and said,

"You'll not have to wait long, Mary, for my secret's on the tip of my tongue. Mary! do you know I sometimes think I'm growing a little blind, and then what would become of grandfather and me? Oh, God help me, Lord help me!"

She fell into an agony of tears, while Mary knelt by her, striving to soothe and to comfort her; but, like an inexperienced person, striving rather to deny the correctness of Margaret's fear, than helping her to meet and overcome the evil.

"No," said Margaret, quietly fixing her tearful eyes on Mary; "I know I'm not mistaken. I have felt one going some time, long before I ever thought what it would lead to; and last autumn I went to a doctor; and he did not mince the matter, but said unless I sat in a darkened room, with my hands before me, my sight would not last me many years longer. But how could I do that, Mary? For one thing, grandfather would have known there was somewhat the matter; and, oh! it will grieve him sore whenever he's told, so the later the better; and besides, Mary, we've sometimes little enough to go upon, and what I

[1] "Sin'," since.

"*Sin* that his lord was twenty yere of age."

*Prologue to Canterbury Tales.*

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earn is a great help. For grandfather takes a day here, and a day there, for botanising or going after insects, and he'll think little enough of four or five shillings for a specimen; dear grandfather! and I'm so loath to think he should be stinted of what gives him such pleasure. So I went to another doctor to try and get him to say something different, and he said, 'Oh, it was only weakness,' and gived me a bottle of lotion; but I've used three bottles (and each of 'em cost two shillings), and my eye is so much worse, not hurting so much, but I can't see a bit with it. There now, Mary," continued she, shutting one eye, "now you only look like a great black shadow, with the edges dancing and sparkling."

"And can you see pretty well with th' other?"

"Yes, pretty near as well as ever. Th' only difference is, that if I sew a long time together, a bright spot like th' sun comes right where I'm looking; all the rest is quite clear but just where I want to see. I've been to both doctors again, and now they're both o' the same story; and I suppose I'm going dark as fast as may be. Plain work pays so bad, and mourning has been so plentiful this winter, that I were tempted to take in any black work I could; and now I'm suffering from it."

"And yet, Margaret, you're going on taking it in; that's what you'd call foolish in another."

"It is, Mary! and yet what can I do? Folk mun live; and I think I should go blind any way, and I darn't tell grandfather else I would leave it off, but he will so fret."

Margaret rocked herself backward and forward to still her emotion.

"Oh, Mary!" she said, "I try to get his face off by heart, and I stare at him so when he's not looking and then shut my eyes to see if I can remember his dear face. There's one thing, Mary, that serves a bit to comfort me. You'll have heard of old Jacob Butterworth, the singing weaver? Well, I know'd him a bit, so I went to him, and said how I wished he'd teach me the right way o' singing; and he says I've a rare fine voice, and I go once a week, and take a lesson fra' him. He's been a grand singer in his day. He led th' chorusses at the Festivals, and got thanked many a time by London folk; and one foreign singer, Madame Catalani, turned round and shook him by th' hand before the Oud Church [1] full o' people. He says I may gain ever so much money by singing; but I don't know. Any rate, it's sad work, being blind."

[1] "Old Church;" now the Cathedral of Manchester.

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She took up her sewing, saying her eyes were rested now, and for some time they sewed on in silence.

Suddenly there were steps heard in the little paved court; person after person ran past the curtained window.

"Something's up," said Mary. She went to the door and stopping the first person she saw, inquired the cause of the commotion.

"Eh, wench! donna ye see the fire-light? Carsons' mill is blazing away like fun;" and away her informant ran.

"Come, Margaret, on wi' your bonnet, and let's go to see Carsons' mill; it's afire, and they say a burning mill is such a grand sight. I never saw one."

"Well, I think it's a fearful sight. Besides, I've all this work to do."

But Mary coaxed in her sweet manner, and with her gentle caresses, promising to help with the gowns all night long if necessary, nay, saying she should quite enjoy it.

The truth was, Margaret's secret weighed heavily and painfully on her mind, and she felt her inability to comfort; besides, she wanted to change the current of Margaret's thoughts; and in addition to these unselfish feelings, came the desire she had honestly expressed, of seeing a factory on fire.

So in two minutes they were ready. At the threshold of the house they met John Barton, to whom they told their errand.

"Carsons' mill! Ay, there is a mill on fire somewhere, sure enough, by the light, and it will be a rare blaze, for there's not a drop o' water to be got. And much Carsons will care, for they're well insured, and the machines are a' th' oud-fashioned kind. See if they don't think it a fine thing for themselves. They'll not thank them as tries to put it out."

He gave way for the impatient girls to pass. Guided by the ruddy light more than by any exact knowledge of the streets that led to the mill, they scampered along with bent heads facing the terrible east wind as best they might.

Carsons' mill ran lengthways from east to west. Along it went one of the oldest thoroughfares in Manchester. Indeed all that part of the town was comparatively old; it was there that the first cotton mills were built, and the crowded alleys and back streets of the neighbourhood made a fire there particularly to be dreaded. The staircase of the mill ascended from the entrance at the western end, which faced into a wide dingy-looking street, consisting principally of public-houses, pawnbrokers' shops, rag and bone warehouses, and dirty provision

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shops. The other, the east end of the factory, fronted into a very narrow back street, not twenty feet wide, and miserably lighted and paved. Right against this end of the factory were the gable ends of the last house in the principal street—a house which from its size, its handsome stone facings, and the attempt at ornament in the front, had probably been once a gentleman's house; but now the light which streamed from its enlarged front windows made clear the interior of the splendidly fitted up room, with its painted walls, its pillared recesses, its gilded and gorgeous fittings up, its miserable, squalid inmates. It was a gin palace.

Mary almost wished herself away, so fearful (as Margaret had said) was the sight when they joined the crowd assembled to witness the fire. There was a murmur of many voices whenever the roaring of the flames ceased for an instant. It was easy to perceive the mass were deeply interested.

"What do they say?" asked Margaret of a neighbour in the crowd, as she caught a few words, clear and distinct, from the general murmur.

"There never is any one in the mill, surely!" exclaimed Mary, as the sea of upward-turned faces moved with one accord to the eastern end, looking into Dunham Street, the narrow back lane already mentioned.

The western end of the mill, whither the raging flames were driven by the wind, was crowned and turreted with triumphant fire. It sent forth its infernal tongues from every window hole, licking the black walls with amorous fierceness; it was swayed or fell before the mighty gale, only to rise higher and yet higher, to ravage and roar yet more wildly. This part of the roof fell in with an astounding crash, while the crowd struggled more and more to press into Dunham Street, for what were magnificent terrible flames, what were falling timbers or tottering walls, in comparison with human life?

There, where the devouring flames had been repelled by the yet more powerful wind, but where yet black smoke gushed out from every aperture, there, at one of the windows on the fourth story, or rather a doorway where a crane was fixed to hoist up goods, might occasionally be seen, when the thick gusts of smoke cleared partially away for an instant, the imploring figures of two men. They had remained after the rest of the workmen for some reason or other, and, owing to the wind having driven the fire in the opposite direction, had perceived no sight or sound of alarm, till long after (if anything

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could be called long in that throng of terrors which passed by in less time than half an hour) the fire had consumed the old wooden staircase at the other end of the building. I am not sure whether it was not the first sound of the rushing crowd below that made them fully aware of their awful position.

"Where are the engines?" asked Margaret of her neighbour.

"They're coming, no doubt; but, bless you, I think it's bare ten minutes since we first found out th' fire; it rages so wi' this wind, and all so dry-like."

"Is no one gone for a ladder?" gasped Mary, as the men were susceptibly, though not audibly, praying the great multitude below for help.

"Ay, Wilson's son and another man were off like a shot, well-nigh five minute agone. But th' masons, and slaters, and such-like, have left their work, and locked up the yards."

Wilson! then, was that man whose figure loomed out against the ever increasing dull hot light behind, whenever the smoke was clear,—was that George Wilson? Mary sickened with terror. She knew he worked for Carsons; but at first she had had no idea any lives were in danger; and since she was aware of this, the heated air, the roaring flames, the dizzy light, and the agitated and murmuring crowd, had bewildered her thoughts.

"Oh! let us go home, Margaret, I cannot stay."

"We cannot go! See how we are wedged in by folks. Poor Mary! ye won't hanker after a fire again. Hark! listen!"

For through the hushed crowd, pressing round the angle of the mill, and filling up Dunham Street, might be heard the rattle of the engine, the heavy, quick tread of loaded horses.

"Thank God!" said Margaret's neighbour, "the engine's come."

Another pause; the plugs were stiff, and water could not be got.

Then there was a pressure through the crowd, the front rows bearing back on those behind, till the girls were sick with the close ramming confinement. Then a relaxation, and a breathing freely once more.

"'Twas young Wilson and a fireman wi' a ladder," said Margaret's neighbour, a tall man who could overlook the crowd.

"Oh, tell us what you see?" begged Mary.

"They've gotten it fixed against the gin-shop wall. One o' the men i' th' factory has fell back; dazed wi' the smoke, I'll warrant. The floor's not given way there. God!" said he, bringing his eye lower down, "th' ladder's too short! It's a'

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over wi' them, poor chaps. Th' fire's coming slow and sure to that end, and afore they've either gotten water, or another ladder, they'll be dead out and out. Lord have mercy on them!"

A sob, as if of excited women, was heard in the hush of the crowd. Another pressure like the former! Mary clung to Margaret's arm with a pinching grasp, and longed to faint, and be insensible, to escape from the oppressing misery of her sensations. A minute or two.

"They've taken th' ladder into th' Temple of Apollor. Can't press back with it to the yard it came from."

A mighty shout arose; a sound to wake the dead. Up on high, quivering in the air, was seen the end of the ladder, protruding out of a garret window, in the gable end of the gin palace, nearly opposite to the doorway where the men had been seen. Those in the crowd nearest the factory, and consequently best able to see up to the garret window, said that several men were holding one end, and guiding by their weight its passage to the door-way. The garret window-frame had been taken out before the crowd below were aware of the attempt.

At length—for it seemed long, measured by beating hearts, though scarce two minutes had elapsed—the ladder was fixed, an aërial bridge at a dizzy height, across the narrow street.

Every eye was fixed in unwinking anxiety, and people's very breathing seemed stilled in suspense. The men were nowhere to be seen, but the wind appeared, for the moment, higher than ever, and drove back the invading flames to the other end.

Mary and Margaret could see now; right above them danced the ladder in the wind. The crowd pressed back from under; firemen's helmets appeared at the window, holding the ladder firm, when a man, with quick, steady tread, and unmoving head, passed from one side to the other. The multitude did not even whisper while he crossed the perilous bridge, which quivered under him; but when he was across, safe comparatively in the factory, a cheer arose for an instant, checked, however, almost immediately, by the uncertainty of the result, and the desire not in any way to shake the nerves of the brave fellow who had cast his life on such a die.

"There he is again!" sprung to the lips of many, as they saw him at the doorway, standing as if for an instant to breathe a mouthful of the fresher air, before he trusted himself to cross. On his shoulders he bore an insensible body.

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"It's Jem Wilson and his father," whispered Margaret; but Mary knew it before.

The people were sick with anxious terror. He could no longer balance himself with his arms; everything must depend on nerve and eye. They saw the latter was fixed, by the position of the head, which never wavered; the ladder shook under the double weight; but still he never moved his head—he dared not look below. It seemed an age before the crossing was accomplished. At last the window was gained; the bearer relieved from his burden; both had disappeared.

Then the multitude might shout; and above the roaring flames, louder than the blowing of the mighty wind, arose that tremendous burst of applause at the success of the daring enterprise. Then a shrill cry was heard, asking,

"Is the oud man alive, and likely to do?"

"Ay," answered one of the firemen to the hushed crowd below. "He's coming round finely, now he's had a dash of cowd water."

He drew back his head; and the eager inquiries, the shouts, the sea-like murmurs of the moving rolling mass began again to be heard—but for an instant though. In far less time than even that in which I have endeavoured briefly to describe the pause of events, the same bold hero stepped again upon the ladder, with evident purpose to rescue the man yet remaining in the burning mill.

He went across in the same quick steady manner as before, and the people below, made less acutely anxious by his previous success, were talking to each other, shouting out intelligence of the progress of the fire at the other end of the factory, telling of the endeavours of the firemen at that part to obtain water, while the closely packed body of men heaved and rolled from side to side. It was different from the former silent breathless hush. I do not know if it were from this cause, or from the recollection of peril past, or that he looked below, in the breathing moment before returning with the remaining person (a slight little man), slung across his shoulders, but Jem Wilson's step was less steady, his tread more uncertain; he seemed to feel with his foot for the next round of the ladder, to waver, and finally to stop half-way. By this time the crowd was still enough; in the awful instant that intervened no one durst speak, even to encourage. Many turned sick with terror, and shut their eyes to avoid seeing the catastrophe they dreaded. It came. The brave man swayed from side to side, at first as slightly as if only



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balancing himself; but he was evidently losing nerve, and even sense: it was only wonderful how the animal instinct of self-preservation did not overcome every generous feeling, and impel him at once to drop the helpless, inanimate body he carried; perhaps the same instinct told him, that the sudden loss of so heavy a weight would of itself be a great and imminent danger.

"Help me! she's fainted," cried Margaret. But no one heeded. All eyes were directed upwards. At this point of time a rope, with a running noose, was dexterously thrown by one of the firemen, after the manner of a lasso, over the head and round the bodies of the two men. True, it was with rude and slight adjustment; but, slight as it was, it served as a steadying guide; it encouraged the sinking heart, the dizzy head. Once more Jem stepped onwards. He was not hurried by any jerk or pull. Slowly and gradually the rope was hauled in, slowly and gradually did he make the four or five paces between him and safety. The window was gained, and all were saved. The multitude in the street absolutely danced with triumph, and huzzaed and yelled till you would have fancied their very throats would crack; and then with all the fickleness of interest characteristic of a large body of people, pressed and stumbled, and cursed and swore in the hurry to get out of Dunham Street, and back to the immediate scene of the fire, the mighty diapason of whose roaring flames formed an awful accompaniment to the screams, and yells, and imprecations of the struggling crowd.

As they pressed away, Margaret was left, pale and almost sinking under the weight of Mary's body, which she had preserved in an upright position, by keeping her arms tight round Mary's waist, dreading, with reason, the trampling of unheeding feet.

Now, however, she gently let her down on the cold clean pavement; and the change of posture, and the difference in temperature, now that the people had withdrawn from their close neighbourhood, speedily restored her to consciousness.

Her first glance was bewildered and uncertain. She had forgotten where she was. Her cold, hard bed felt strange; the murky glare in the sky affrighted her. She shut her eyes to think, to recollect.

Her next look was upwards. The fearful bridge had been withdrawn; the window was unoccupied.

"They are safe," said Margaret.

"All? Are all safe, Margaret?" asked Mary.

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"Ask yon fireman, and he'll tell you more about it than I can. But I know they're all safe."

The fireman hastily corroborated Margaret's words.

"Why did you let Jem Wilson go twice?" asked Margaret.

"Let?—why we could not hinder him. As soon as ever he'd heard his father speak (which he was na long a doing), Jem were off like a shot; only saying he knowed better nor us where to find t'other man. We'd all ha' gone, if he had na been in such a hurry, for no one can say as Manchester firemen is ever backward when there's danger."

So saying, he ran off; and the two girls, without remark or discussion, turned homewards. They were overtaken by the elder Wilson, pale, grimy, and blear-eyed, but apparently as strong and well as ever. He loitered a minute or two alongside of them, giving an account of his detention in the mill; he then hastily wished good-night, saying he must go home and tell his missis he was all safe and well: but after he had gone a few steps, he turned back, came on Mary's side of the pavement, and in an earnest whisper, which Margaret could not avoid hearing, he said—

"Mary, if my boy comes across you to-night, give him a kind word or two for my sake. Do! bless you, there's a good wench."

Mary hung her head and answered not a word, and in an instant he was gone.

When they arrived at home, they found John Barton smoking his pipe, unwilling to question, yet very willing to hear all the details they could give him. Margaret went over the whole story, and it was amusing to watch his gradually increasing interest and excitement. First, the regular puffing abated, then ceased. Then the pipe was fairly taken out of his mouth, and held suspended. Then he rose, and at every further point he came a step nearer to the narrator.

When it was ended, he swore (an unusual thing for him) that if Jem Wilson wanted Mary he should have her to-morrow, if he had not a penny to keep her.

Margaret laughed, but Mary, who was now recovered from her agitation, pouted, and looked angry.

The work which they had left was resumed: but with full hearts, fingers never go very quickly; and I am sorry to say, that owing to the fire, the two younger Miss Ogdens were in such grief for the loss of their excellent father, that they were unable to appear before the little circle of sympathising friends gathered together to comfort the widow, and see the funeral set off.

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## CHAPTER VI

" How little can the rich man know
Of what the poor man feels,
When Want, like some dark demon foe,
Nearer and nearer steals!

*He* never tramp'd the weary round,
A stroke of work to gain,
And sicken'd at the dreaded sound
Telling him 'twas in vain.

Foot-sore, heart-sore, *he* never came
Back through the winter's wind,
To a dark cellar, there no flame,
No light, no food, to find.

*He* never saw his darlings lie
Shivering, the grass their bed;
*He* never heard that maddening cry,
' Daddy, a bit of bread! ' "

MANCHESTER SONG.

JOHN BARTON was not far wrong in his idea that the Messrs. Carson would not be over-much grieved for the consequences of the fire in their mill. They were well insured; the machinery lacked the improvements of late years, and worked but poorly in comparison with that which might now be procured. Above all, trade was very slack; cottons could find no market, and goods lay packed and piled in many a warehouse. The mills were merely worked to keep the machinery, human and metal, in some kind of order and readiness for better times. So this was an excellent time, Messrs. Carson thought, for refitting their factory with first-rate improvements, for which the insurance money would amply pay. They were in no hurry about the business, however. The weekly drain of wages given for labour, useless in the present state of the market, was stopped. The partners had more leisure than they had known for years; and promised wives and daughters all manner of pleasant excursions, as soon as the weather should become more genial. It was a pleasant thing to be able to lounge over breakfast with a review or newspaper in hand; to have time for becoming acquainted with agreeable and accomplished daughters, on whose education no money had been spared, but whose fathers, shut up during a long day with calicoes and accounts, had so seldom had leisure to enjoy their daughters' talents. There

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were happy family evenings, now that the men of business had time for domestic enjoyments. There is another side to the picture. There were homes over which Carsons' fire threw a deep, terrible gloom; the homes of those who would fain work, and no man gave unto them—the homes of those to whom leisure was a curse. There, the family music was hungry wails, when week after week passed by, and there was no work to be had, and consequently no wages to pay for the bread the children cried aloud for in their young impatience of suffering. There was no breakfast to lounge over; their lounge was taken in bed, to try and keep warmth in them that bitter March weather, and, by being quiet, to deaden the gnawing wolf within. Many a penny that would have gone little way enough in oatmeal or potatoes, bought opium to still the hungry little ones, and make them forget their uneasiness in heavy troubled sleep. It was mother's mercy. The evil and the good of our nature came out strongly then. There were desperate fathers; there were bitter-tongued mothers (oh God! what wonder!); there were reckless children; the very closest bonds of nature were snapt in that time of trial and distress. There was Faith such as the rich can never imagine on earth; there was "Love strong as death;" and self-denial, among rude, coarse men, akin to that of Sir Philip Sidney's most glorious deed. The vices of the poor sometimes astound us *here*; but when the secrets of all hearts shall be made known, their virtues will astound us in far greater degree. Of this I am certain.

As the cold, bleak spring came on (spring, in name alone), and consequently as trade continued dead, other mills shortened hours, turned off hands, and finally stopped work altogether.

Barton worked short hours; Wilson, of course, being a hand in Carsons' factory, had no work at all. But his son, working at an engineer's, and a steady man, obtained wages enough to maintain all the family in a careful way. Still it preyed on Wilson's mind to be so long indebted to his son. He was out of spirits and depressed. Barton was morose, and soured towards mankind as a body, and the rich in particular. One evening, when the clear light at six o'clock contrasted strangely with the Christmas cold, and when the bitter wind piped down every entry, and through every cranny, Barton sat brooding over his stinted fire, and listening for Mary's step, in unacknowledged trust that her presence would cheer him. The door was opened, and Wilson came breathless in.

"You've not got a bit o' money by you, Barton?" asked he.

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"Not I; who has now, I'd like to know. Whatten you want it for?"

"I donnot[1] want it for mysel, tho' we've none to spare. But don ye know Ben Davenport as worked at Carsons'? He's down wi' the fever, and ne'er a stick o' fire nor a cowd[2] potato in the house."

"I han got no money, I tell ye," said Barton. Wilson looked disappointed. Barton tried not to be interested, but he could not help it in spite of his gruffness. He rose, and went to the cupboard (his wife's pride long ago). There lay the remains of his dinner, hastily put there ready for supper. Bread, and a slice of cold fat boiled bacon. He wrapped them in his handkerchief, put them in the crown of his hat, and said—"Come, let us be going."

"Going—art thou going to work this time o' day?"

"No, stupid, to be sure not. Going to see the fellow thou spoke on." So they put on their hats and set out. On the way Wilson said Davenport was a good fellow, though too much of the Methodee; that his children were too young to work, but not too young to be cold and hungry; that they had sunk lower and lower, and pawned thing after thing, and that now they lived in a cellar in Berry Street, off Store Street. Barton growled inarticulate words of no benevolent import to a large class of mankind, and so they went along till they arrived in Berry Street. It was unpaved; and down the middle a gutter forced its way, every now and then forming pools in the holes with which the street abounded. Never was the old Edinburgh cry of "Gardez l'eau" more necessary than in this street. As they passed, women from their doors tossed household slops of *every* description into the gutter; they ran into the next pool, which overflowed and stagnated. Heaps of ashes were the stepping-stones, on which the passer-by, who cared in the least for cleanliness, took care not to put his foot. Our friends were not dainty, but even they picked their way till they got to some steps leading down into a small area, where a person standing would have his head about one foot below the level of the street, and might at the same time, without the least motion of his body, touch the window of the cellar and the damp muddy wall right opposite. You went down one step even from the

[1] "Don" is constantly used in Lancashire for "do;" as it was by our older writers. "And that may non Hors *don*."—*Sir J. Mandeville.*

"But for th' entent to *don* this sinne."—*Chaucer.*

[2] "Cowd," cold. Teut., *kaud*. Dutch, *koud*.

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foul area into the cellar in which a family of human beings lived. It was very dark inside. The window-panes of many of them were broken and stuffed with rags, which was reason enough for the dusky light that pervaded the place even at mid-day. After the account I have given of the state of the street, no one can be surprised that on going into the cellar inhabited by Davenport, the smell was so fœtid as almost to knock the two men down. Quickly recovering themselves, as those inured to such things do, they began to penetrate the thick darkness of the place, and to see three or four little children rolling on the damp, nay wet, brick floor, through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up; the fire-place was empty and black; the wife sat on her husband's lair, and cried in the dank loneliness.

"See, missis, I'm back again.—Hold your noise, children, and don't mither [1] your mammy for bread, here's a chap as has got some for you."

In that dim light, which was darkness to strangers, they clustered round Barton, and tore from him the food he had brought with him. It was a large hunch of bread, but it had vanished in an instant.

"We mun do summut for 'em," said he to Wilson. "Ye stop here, and I'll be back in half-an-hour."

So he strode, and ran, and hurried home. He emptied into the ever-useful pocket-handkerchief the little meal remaining in the mug. Mary would have her tea at Miss Simmonds'; her food for the day was safe. Then he went upstairs for his better coat, and his one, gay, red-and-yellow silk pocket-handkerchief — his jewels, his plate, his valuables, these were. He went to the pawnshop; he pawned them for five shillings; he stopped not, nor stayed, till he was once more in London Road, within five minutes' walk of Berry Street — then he loitered in his gait, in order to discover the shops he wanted. He bought meat, and a loaf of bread, candles, chips, and from a little retail yard he purchased a couple of hundredweights of coals. Some money yet remained—all destined for them, but he did not yet know how best to spend it. Food, light, and warmth he had instantly seen were necessary; for luxuries he would wait. Wilson's eyes filled with tears when he saw Barton enter with his purchases. He understood it all, and longed to be once more in work, that he might help in some

[1] "Mither," to trouble and perplex. "I'm welly mithered"—I'm well nigh crazed.

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of these material ways, without feeling that he was using his son's money. But though "silver and gold he had none," he gave heart-service, and love-works of far more value. Nor was John Barton behind in these. "The fever" was (as it usually is in Manchester) of a low, putrid, typhoid kind; brought on by miserable living, filthy neighbourhood, and great depression of mind and body. It is virulent, malignant, and highly infectious. But the poor are fatalists with regard to infection; and well for them it is so, for in their crowded dwellings no invalid can be isolated. Wilson asked Barton if he thought he should catch it, and was laughed at for his idea.

The two men, rough, tender nurses as they were, lighted the fire, which smoked and puffed into the room as if it did not know the way up the damp, unused chimney. The very smoke seemed purifying and healthy in the thick clammy air. The children clamoured again for bread; but this time Barton took a piece first to the poor, helpless, hopeless woman, who still sat by the side of her husband, listening to his anxious miserable mutterings. She took the bread, when it was put into her hand, and broke a bit, but could not eat. She was past hunger. She fell down on the floor with a heavy unresisting bang. The men looked puzzled. "She's well-nigh clemmed," said Barton. "Folk do say one mustn't give clemmed people much to eat; but, bless us, she'll eat naught."

"I'll tell yo what I'll do," said Wilson. "I'll take these two big lads, as does nought but fight, home to my missis's for to-night, and I will get a jug o' tea. Them women always does best with tea and such-like slop."

So Barton was now left alone with a little child, crying (when it had done eating) for mammy; with a fainting, dead-like woman; and with the sick man, whose mutterings were rising up to screams and shrieks of agonised anxiety. He carried the woman to the fire, and chafed her hands. He looked around for something to raise her head. There was literally nothing but some loose bricks. However, those he got; and taking off his coat he covered them with it as well as he could. He pulled her feet to the fire, which now began to emit some faint heat. He looked round for water, but the poor woman had been too weak to drag herself out to the distant pump, and water there was none. He snatched the child, and ran up the area-steps to the room above, and borrowed their only saucepan with some water in it. Then he began, with the useful skill of a working-man, to make some gruel; and when it was hastily made, he

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seized a battered iron table-spoon (kept when many other little things had been sold in a lot), in order to feed baby, and with it he forced one or two drops between her clenched teeth. The mouth opened mechanically to receive more, and gradually she revived. She sat up and looked round; and recollecting all, fell down again in weak and passive despair. Her little child crawled to her, and wiped with its fingers the thick-coming tears which she now had strength to weep. It was now high time to attend to the man. He lay on straw, so damp and mouldy no dog would have chosen it in preference to flags; over it was a piece of sacking, coming next to his worn skeleton of a body; above him was mustered every article of clothing that could be spared by mother or children this bitter weather; and in addition to his own, these might have given as much warmth as one blanket, could they have been kept on him; but as he restlessly tossed to and fro, they fell off and left him shivering in spite of the burning heat of his skin. Every now and then he started up in his naked madness, looking like the prophet of woe in the fearful plague-picture; but he soon fell again in exhaustion, and Barton found he must be closely watched, lest in these falls he should injure himself against the hard brick floor. He was thankful when Wilson reappeared, carrying in both hands a jug of steaming tea, intended for the poor wife; but when the delirious husband saw drink, he snatched at it with animal instinct, with a selfishness he had never shown in health.

Then the two men consulted together. It seemed decided without a word being spoken on the subject, that both should spend the night with the forlorn couple; that was settled. But could no doctor be had? In all probability no; the next day an infirmary order must be begged, but meanwhile the only medical advice they could have must be from a druggist's. So Barton (being the moneyed man) set out to find a shop in London Road.

It is a pretty sight to walk through a street with lighted shops; the gas is so brilliant, the display of goods so much more vividly shown than by day, and of all shops a druggist's looks the most like the tales of our childhood, from Aladdin's garden of enchanted fruits to the charming Rosamond with her purple jar. No such associations had Barton; yet he felt the contrast between the well-filled, well-lighted shops and the dim gloomy cellar, and it made him moody that such contrasts should exist. They are the mysterious problem of life to more than him. He wondered if any in all the hurrying crowd had come from such a house of mourning. He thought they all looked joyous, and he was angry

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with them. But he could not, you cannot, read the lot of those who daily pass you by in the street. How do you know the wild romances of their lives; the trials, the temptations they are even now enduring, resisting, sinking under? You may be elbowed one instant by the girl desperate in her abandonment, laughing in mad merriment with her outward gesture, while her soul is longing for the rest of the dead, and bringing itself to think of the cold-flowing river as the only mercy of God remaining to her here. You may pass the criminal, meditating crimes at which you will to-morrow shudder with horror as you read them. You may push against one, humble and unnoticed, the last upon earth, who in Heaven will for ever be in the immediate light of God's countenance. Errands of mercy—errands of sin—did you ever think where all the thousands of people you daily meet are bound? Barton's was an errand of mercy; but the thoughts of his heart were touched by sin, by bitter hatred of the happy, whom he, for the time, confounded with the selfish.

He reached a druggist's shop, and entered. The druggist (whose smooth manners seemed to have been salved over with his own spermaceti) listened attentively to Barton's description of Davenport's illness; concluded it was typhus fever, very prevalent in that neighbourhood; and proceeded to make up a bottle of medicine, sweet spirits of nitre, or some such innocent potion, very good for slight colds, but utterly powerless to stop, for an instant, the raging fever of the poor man it was intended to relieve. He recommended the same course they had previously determined to adopt, applying the next morning for an infirmary order; and Barton left the shop with comfortable faith in the physic given him; for men of his class, if they believe in physic at all, believe that every description is equally efficacious.

Meanwhile, Wilson had done what he could at Davenport's home. He had soothed, and covered the man many a time; he had fed and hushed the little child, and spoken tenderly to the woman, who lay still in her weakness and her weariness. He had opened a door, but only for an instant; it led into a back cellar, with a grating instead of a window, down which dropped the moisture from pigstyes, and worse abominations. It was not paved; the floor was one mass of bad-smelling mud. It had never been used, for there was not an article of furniture in it; nor could a human being, much less a pig, have lived there many days. Yet the "back apartment" made a difference in the rent. The Davenports paid threepence more for having two

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rooms. When he turned round again, he saw the woman suckling the child from her dry withered breast.

"Surely the lad is weaned!" exclaimed he, in surprise. "Why, how old is he?"

"Going on two year," she faintly answered. "But, oh! it keeps him quiet when I've nought else to gi' him, and he'll get a bit of sleep lying there, if he's getten [1] nought beside. We han done our best to gi' the childer [2] food, howe'er we pinched ourselves."

"Han [3] ye had no money fra th' town?"

"No; my master is Buckinghamshire born; and he's feared the town would send him back to his parish, if he went to th' board; so we've just borne on in hope o' better times. But I think they'll never come in my day;" and the poor woman began her weak high-pitched cry again.

"Here, sup [4] this drop o' gruel, and then try and get a bit o' sleep. John and I'll watch by your master to-night."

"God's blessing be on you!"

She finished the gruel and fell into a dead sleep. Wilson covered her with his coat as well as he could, and tried to move lightly for fear of disturbing her; but there need have been no such dread, for her sleep was profound and heavy with exhaustion. Once only she roused to pull the coat round her little child.

And now all Wilson's care, and Barton's to boot, was wanted to restrain the wild mad agony of the fevered man. He started up, he yelled, he seemed infuriated by overwhelming anxiety. He cursed and swore, which surprised Wilson, who knew his piety in health, and who did not know the unbridled tongue of delirium. At length he seemed exhausted, and fell asleep; and Barton and Wilson drew near the fire, and talked together in whispers. They sat on the floor, for chairs there were none; the sole table was an old tub turned upside-down. They put out the candle and conversed by the flickering fire-light.

"Han yo known this chap long?" asked Barton.

"Better nor three year. He's worked wi' Carsons that long, and were alway a steady, civil-spoken fellow, though, as I said afore, somewhat of a Methodee. I wish I'd gotten a letter he sent his missis, a week or two agone, when he were on tramp

[1] "For he had *geten* him yet no benefice."—*Prologue to Canterbury Tales.*
[2] Wickliffe use "*childre*" in his *Apology*, page 26.
[3] "What concord *han* light and dark."—*Spenser.*
[4] "And they *soupe* the brothe thereof."—*Sir J. Mandeville.*

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for work. It did my heart good to read it; for, yo see, I were a bit grumbling mysel; it seemed hard to be spunging on Jem, and taking a' his flesh-meat money to buy bread for me and them as I ought to be keeping. But, yo know, though I can earn nought, I mun eat summut. Well, as I telled ye, I were grumbling, when she (indicating the sleeping woman by a nod) brought me Ben's letter, for she could na read hersel. It were as good as Bible-words; ne'er a word o' repining; a' about God being our father, and that we mun bear patiently whate'er he sends."

"Don ye think he's th' masters' father, too? I'd be loth to have 'em for brothers."

"Eh, John! donna talk so; sure there's many and many a master as good or better nor us."

"If you think so, tell me this. How comes it they're rich, and we're poor? I'd like to know that. Han they done as they'd be done for by us?"

But Wilson was no arguer. No speechifier as he would have called it. So Barton, seeing he was likely to have it his own way, went on.

"You'll say (at least many a one does), they'n [1] getten capital an' we'n getten none. I say, our labour's our capital and we ought to draw interest on that. They get interest on their capital somehow a' this time, while ourn is lying idle, else how could they all live as they do? Besides, there's many on 'em has had nought to begin wi'; there's Carsons, and Duncombes, and Mengies, and many another, as comed into Manchester with clothes to their back, and that were all, and now they're worth their tens of thousands, a' getten out of our labour; why the very land as fetched but sixty pound twenty year agone is now worth six hundred, and that, too, is owing to our labour: but look at yo, and see me, and poor Davenport yonder; whatten better are we? They'n screwed us down to th' lowest peg, in order to make their great big fortunes, and build their great big houses, and we, why we're just clemming, many and many of us. Can you say there's nought wrong in this?"

"Well, Barton, I'll not gainsay ye. But Mr. Carson spoke to me after th' fire, and says he, 'I shall ha' to retrench, and be very careful in my expenditure during these bad times, I assure ye;' so yo see th' masters suffer too."

"Han they ever seen a child o' their'n die for want o' food?" asked Barton, in a low, deep voice.

[1] "They'n," contraction of "they han," they have.

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"I donnot mean," continued he, "to say as I'm so badly off. I'd scorn to speak for mysel; but when I see such men as Davenport there dying away, for very clemming, I cannot stand it. I've but gotten Mary, and she keeps hersel pretty much. I think we'll ha' to give up housekeeping; but that I donnot mind."

And in this kind of talk the night, the long heavy night of watching, wore away. As far as they could judge, Davenport continued in the same state, although the symptoms varied occasionally. The wife slept on, only roused by a cry of her child now and then, which seemed to have power over her, when far louder noises failed to disturb her. The watchers agreed, that as soon as it was likely Mr. Carson would be up and visible, Wilson should go to his house and beg for an infirmary order. At length the grey dawn penetrated even into the dark cellar; Davenport slept, and Barton was to remain there until Wilson's return; so, stepping out into the fresh air, brisk and reviving, even in that street of abominations, Wilson took his way to Mr. Carson's.

Wilson had about two miles to walk before he reached Mr. Carson's house, which was almost in the country. The streets were not yet bustling and busy. The shopmen were lazily taking down the shutters, although it was near eight o'clock; for the day was long enough for the purchases people made in that quarter of the town, while trade was so flat. One or two miserable-looking women were setting off on their day's begging expedition. But there were few people abroad. Mr. Carson's was a good house, and furnished with disregard to expense. But in addition to lavish expenditure, there was much taste shown, and many articles chosen for their beauty and elegance adorned his rooms. As Wilson passed a window which a house-maid had thrown open, he saw pictures and gilding, at which he was tempted to stop and look; but then he thought it would not be respectful. So he hastened on to the kitchen door. The servants seemed very busy with preparations for breakfast; but good-naturedly, though hastily, told him to step in, and they could soon let Mr. Carson know he was there. So he was ushered into a kitchen hung round with glittering tins, where a roaring fire burnt merrily, and where numbers of utensils hung round, at whose nature and use Wilson amused himself by guessing. Meanwhile, the servants bustled to and fro; an outdoor man-servant came in for orders, and sat down near

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Wilson. The cook broiled steaks, and the kitchen-maid toasted bread, and boiled eggs.

The coffee steamed upon the fire, and altogether the odours were so mixed and appetising, that Wilson began to yearn for food to break his fast, which had lasted since dinner the day before. If the servants had known this, they would have willingly given him meat and bread in abundance; but they were like the rest of us, and not feeling hunger themselves, forgot it was possible another might. So Wilson's craving turned to sickness, while they chatted on, making the kitchen's free and keen remarks upon the parlour.

"How late you were last night, Thomas!"

"Yes, I was right weary of waiting; they told me to be at the rooms by twelve; and there I was. But it was two o'clock before they called me."

"And did you wait all that time in the street?" asked the housemaid, who had done her work for the present, and come into the kitchen for a bit of gossip.

"My eye as like! you don't think I'm such a fool as to catch my death of cold, and let the horses catch their death too, as we should ha' done if we'd stopped there. No! I put th' horses up in th' stables at th' Spread Eagle, and went mysel', and got a glass or two by th' fire. They're driving a good custom, them, wi' coachmen. There were five on us, and we'd many a quart o' ale, and gin wi' it, to keep out cold."

"Mercy on us, Thomas; you'll get a drunkard at last!"

"If I do, I know whose blame it will be. It will be missis's, and not mine. Flesh and blood can't sit to be starved to death on a coach-box, waiting for folks as don't know their own mind."

A servant, semi-upper-housemaid, semi-lady's-maid, now came down with orders from her mistress.

"Thomas, you must ride to the fishmonger's, and say missis can't give above half-a-crown a pound for salmon for Tuesday; she's grumbling because trade's so bad. And she'll want the carriage at three to go to the lecture, Thomas; at the Royal Execution, you know."

"Ay, ay, I know."

"And you'd better all of you mind your P's and Q's, for she's very black this morning. She's got a bad headache."

"It's a pity Miss Jenkins is not here to match her. Lord! how she and missis did quarrel which had got the worst headaches, it was that Miss Jenkins left for; she would not give up

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having bad headaches, and missis could not abide any one to have 'em but herself."

"Missis will have her breakfast upstairs, cook, and the cold partridge as was left yesterday, and put plenty of cream in her coffee, and she thinks there's a roll left, and she would like it well buttered."

So saying, the maid left the kitchen to be ready to attend to the young ladies' bell when they chose to ring, after their late assembly the night before.

In the luxurious library, at the well-spread breakfast-table, sat the two Mr. Carsons, father and son. Both were reading; the father a newspaper, the son a review, while they lazily enjoyed their nicely prepared food. The father was a prepossessing-looking old man; perhaps self-indulgent you might guess. The son was strikingly handsome, and knew it. His dress was neat and well appointed, and his manners far more gentlemanly than his father's. He was the only son, and his sisters were proud of him; his father and mother were proud of him: he could not set up his judgment against theirs; he was proud of himself.

The door opened and in bounded Amy, the sweet youngest daughter of the house, a lovely girl of sixteen, fresh and glowing, and bright as a rosebud. She was too young to go to assemblies, at which her father rejoiced, for he had little Amy with her pretty jokes, and her bird-like songs, and her playful caresses all the evening to amuse him in his loneliness; and she was not too much tired, like Sophy and Helen, to give him her sweet company at breakfast the next morning.

He submitted willingly while she blinded him with her hands, and kissed his rough red face all over. She took his newspaper away after a little pretended resistance, and would not allow her brother Harry to go on with his review.

"I'm the only lady this morning, papa, so you know you must make a great deal of me."

"My darling, I think you have your own way always, whether you're the only lady or not."

"Yes, papa, you're pretty good and obedient, I must say that; but I'm sorry to say Harry is very naughty, and does not do what I tell him; do you, Harry?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean to accuse me of, Amy; I expected praise and not blame; for did not I get you that eau de Portugal from town, that you could not meet with at Hughes', you little ungrateful puss?"

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"Did you? Oh, sweet Harry; you're as sweet as eau de Portugal yourself; you're almost as good as papa; but still you know you did go and forget to ask Bigland for that rose, that new rose they say he has got."

"No, Amy, I did not forget. I asked him, and he has got the rose, *sans reproche;* but do you know, little Miss Extravagance, a very small one is half a guinea?"

"Oh, I don't mind. Papa will give it me, won't you, dear father? He knows his little daughter can't live without flowers and scents?"

Mr. Carson tried to refuse his darling, but she coaxed him into acquiescence, saying she must have it, it was one of her necessaries. Life was not worth having without flowers.

"Then, Amy," said her brother, "try and be content with peonies and dandelions."

"Oh you wretch! I don't call them flowers. Besides, you're every bit as extravagant. Who gave half-a-crown for a bunch of lilies of the valley at Yates', a month ago, and then would not let his poor little sister have them, though she went on her knees to beg them? Answer me that, Master Hal."

"Not on compulsion," replied her brother, smiling with his mouth, while his eyes had an irritated expression, and he went first red, then pale, with vexed embarrassment.

"If you please, sir," said a servant, entering the room, "here's one of the mill people wanting to see you; his name is Wilson, he says."

"I'll come to him directly; stay, tell him to come in here."

Amy danced off into the conservatory which opened out of the room, before the gaunt, pale, unwashed, unshaven weaver was ushered in. There he stood at the door, sleeking his hair with old country habit, and every now and then stealing a glance round at the splendour of the apartment.

"Well, Wilson, and what do you want to-day, man?"

"Please, sir, Davenport's ill of the fever, and I'm come to know if you've got an infirmary order for him?"

"Davenport—Davenport; who is the fellow? I don't know the name."

"He's worked in your factory better nor three years, sir."

"Very likely, I don't pretend to know the names of the men I employ; that I leave to the overlooker. So he's ill, eh?"

"Ay, sir, he's very bad; we want to get him in at the Fever Wards."

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"I doubt if I've an in-patient's order to spare at present; but I'll give you an out-patient's, and welcome."

So saying, he rose up, unlocked a drawer, pondered a minute, and then gave Wilson an out-patient's order.

Meanwhile, the younger Mr. Carson had ended his review, and began to listen to what was going on. He finished his breakfast, got up, and pulled five shillings out of his pocket, which he gave to Wilson as he passed him, for the "poor fellow." He went past quickly, and calling for his horse, mounted gaily, and rode away. He was anxious to be in time to have a look and a smile from lovely Mary Barton, as she went to Miss Simmonds'. But to-day he was to be disappointed. Wilson left the house, not knowing whether to be pleased or grieved. They had all spoken kindly to him, and who could tell if they might not inquire into Davenport's case, and do something for him and his family. Besides, the cook, who, when she had had time to think, after breakfast was sent in, had noticed his paleness, had had meat and bread ready to put in his hand when he came out of the parlour; and a full stomach makes every one of (us) more hopeful.

When he reached Berry Street, he had persuaded himself he bore good news, and felt almost elated in his heart. But it fell when he opened the cellar-door, and saw Barton and the wife both bending over the sick man's couch with awe-struck, saddened look.

"Come here," said Barton. "There's a change comed over him sin' yo left, is there not?"

Wilson looked. The flesh was sunk, the features prominent, bony, and rigid. The fearful clay-colour of death was over all. But the eyes were open and sensible, though the films of the grave were settling upon them.

"He wakened fra his sleep, as yo left him in, and began to mutter and moan; but he soon went off again, and we never knew he were awake till he called his wife, but now she's here he's gotten nought to say to her."

Most probably, as they all felt, he could not speak, for his strength was fast ebbing. They stood round him still and silent; even the wife checked her sobs, though her heart was like to break. She held her child to her breast, to try and keep him quiet. Their eyes were all fixed on the yet living one, whose moments of life were passing so rapidly away. At length he brought (with jerking convulsive effort) his two hands into the



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attitude of prayer. They saw his lips move, and bent to catch the words, which came in gasps, and not in tones.

"Oh Lord God! I thank thee, that the hard struggle of living is over."

"Oh, Ben, Ben!" wailed forth his wife, "have you no thought for me? Oh, Ben! Ben! do say one word to help me through life."

He could not speak again. The trump of the archangel would set his tongue free; but not a word more would it utter till then. Yet he heard, he understood, and though sight failed, he moved his hand gropingly over the covering. They knew what he meant, and guided it to her head, bowed and hidden in her hands, when she had sunk in her woe. It rested there with a feeble pressure of endearment. The face grew beautiful, as the soul neared God. A peace beyond understanding came over it. The hand was a heavy stiff weight on the wife's head. No more grief or sorrow for him. They reverently laid out the corpse—Wilson fetching his only spare shirt to array it in. The wife still lay hidden in the clothes, in a stupor of agony.

There was a knock at the door, and Barton went to open it. It was Mary, who had received a message from her father, through a neighbour, telling her where he was; and she had set out early to come and have a word with him before her day's work; but some errands she had to do for Miss Simmonds had detained her until now.

"Come in, wench!" said her father. "Try if thou canst comfort yon poor, poor woman, kneeling down there. God help her." Mary did not know what to say, or how to comfort; but she knelt down by her, and put her arm round her neck, and in a little while fell to crying herself so bitterly that the source of tears was opened by sympathy in the widow, and her full heart was, for a time, relieved.

And Mary forgot all purposed meeting with her gay lover, Harry Carson; forgot Miss Simmonds' errands, and her anger, in the anxious desire to comfort the poor lone woman. Never had her sweet face looked more angelic, never had her gentle voice seemed so musical as when she murmured her broken sentences of comfort.

"Oh, don't cry so, dear Mrs. Davenport, pray don't take on so. Sure he's gone where he'll never know care again. Yes, I know how lonesome you must feel; but think of your children. Oh! we'll all help to earn food for 'em. Think how sorry *he'd* be, if he sees you fretting so. Don't cry so, please don't."

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And she ended by crying herself as passionately as the poor widow.

It was agreed that the town must bury him; he had paid to a burial club as long he could; but by a few weeks' omission, he had forfeited his claim to a sum of money now. Would Mrs. Davenport and the little child go home with Mary? The latter brightened up as she urged this plan; but no! where the poor, fondly loved remains were, there would the mourner be; and all that they could do was to make her as comfortable as their funds would allow, and to beg a neighbour to look in and say a word at times. So she was left alone with her dead, and they went to work that had work, and he who had none, took upon him the arrangements for the funeral.

Mary had many a scolding from Miss Simmonds that day for her absence of mind. To be sure Miss Simmonds was much put out by Mary's non-appearance in the morning with certain bits of muslin, and shades of silk which were wanted to complete a dress to be worn that night; but it was true enough that Mary did not mind what she was about; she was too busy planning how her old black gown (her best when her mother died) might be spunged, and turned, and lengthened into something like decent mourning for the widow. And when she went home at night (though it was very late, as a sort of retribution for her morning's negligence), she set to work at once, and was so busy and so glad over her task, that she had, every now and then, to check herself in singing merry ditties, that she felt little accorded with the sewing on which she was engaged.

So when the funeral day came, Mrs. Davenport was neatly arrayed in black, a satisfaction to her poor heart in the midst of her sorrow. Barton and Wilson both accompanied her, as she led her two elder boys, and followed the coffin. It was a simple walking funeral, with nothing to grate on the feelings of any; far more in accordance with its purpose, to my mind, than the gorgeous hearses, and nodding plumes, which form the grotesque funeral pomp of respectable people. There was no "rattling the bones over the stones," of the pauper's funeral. Decently and patiently was he followed to the grave by one determined to endure her woe meekly for his sake. The only mark of pauperism attendant on the burial concerned the living and joyous, far more than the dead, or the sorrowful. When they arrived in the churchyard, they halted before a raised and handsome tombstone; in reality a wooden mockery of stone respectabilities which adorned the burial-ground. It was easily

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raised in a very few minutes, and below was the grave in which pauper bodies were piled until within a foot or two of the surface; when the soil was shovelled over, and stamped down, and the wooden cover went to do temporary duty over another hole.[1] But little they recked of this who now gave up their dead.

## CHAPTER VII

" How infinite the wealth of love and hope
Garnered in these same tiny treasure-houses!
And oh! what bankrupts in the world we feel,
When Death, like some remorseless creditor,
Seizes on all we fondly thought our own!"

" THE TWINS."

THE ghoul-like fever was not to be braved with impunity, and baulked of its prey. The widow had reclaimed her children; her neighbours, in the good Samaritan sense of the word, had paid her little arrears of rent, and made her a few shillings beforehand with the world. She determined to flit from that cellar to another less full of painful associations, less haunted by mournful memories. The board, not so formidable as she had imagined, had inquired into her case; and, instead of sending her to Stoke Claypole, her husband's Buckinghamshire parish, as she had dreaded, had agreed to pay her rent. So food for four mouths was all she was now required to find; only for three she would have said; for herself and the unweaned child were but reckoned as one in her calculation.

She had a strong heart, now her bodily strength had been recruited by a week or two of food, and she would not despair. So she took in some little children to nurse, who brought their daily food with them, which she cooked for them, without wronging their helplessness of a crumb; and when she had restored them to their mother's at night, she set to work at plain sewing, " seam, and gusset, and band," and sat thinking how she might best cheat the factory inspector, and persuade him that her strong, big, hungry Ben was above thirteen. Her plan of living was so far arranged, when she heard, with keen sorrow, that Wilson's twin lads were ill of the fever.

They had never been strong. They were like many a pair of twins, and seemed to have but one life divided between them.

[1] The case, to my certain knowledge, in one churchyard in Manchester. There may be more.

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One life, one strength, and in this instance, I might almost say, one brain; for they were helpless, gentle, silly children, but not the less dear to their parents and to their strong, active, manly elder brother. They were late on their feet, late in talking, late every way; had to be nursed and cared for when other lads of their age were tumbling about in the street, and losing themselves and being taken to the police-office miles away from home.

Still want had never yet come in at the door to make love for these innocents fly out at the window. Nor was this the case even now, when Jem Wilson's earnings, and his mother's occasional charrings were barely sufficient to give all the family their fill of food.

But when the twins, after ailing many days, and caring little for their meat, fell sick on the same afternoon, with the same heavy stupor of suffering, the three hearts that loved them so, each felt, though none acknowledged to the other, that they had little chance for life. It was nearly a week before the tale of their illness spread as far as the court where the Wilsons had once dwelt, and the Bartons yet lived.

Alice had heard of the sickness of her little nephews several days before, and had locked her cellar door, and gone off straight to her brother's house, in Ancoats; but she was often absent for days, sent for, as her neighbours knew, to help in some sudden emergency of illness or distress, so that occasioned no surprise.

Margaret met Jem Wilson several days after his brothers were seriously ill, and heard from him the state of things at his home. She told Mary of it as she entered the court late that evening; and Mary listened with saddened heart to the strange contrast which such woeful tidings presented to the gay and loving words she had been hearing on her walk home. She blamed herself for being so much taken up with visions of the golden future, that she had lately gone but seldom on Sunday afternoons, or other leisure time, to see Mrs. Wilson, her mother's friend; and with hasty purpose of amendment she only stayed to leave a message for her father with the next-door neighbour, and then went off at a brisk pace on her way to the house of mourning.

She stopped with her hand on the latch of the Wilson's door, to still her beating heart, and listened to the hushed quiet within. She opened the door softly: there sat Mrs. Wilson in the old rocking-chair, with one sick, death-like boy lying on her knee, crying without let or pause, but softly, gently, as fearing to disturb the troubled gasping child; while behind her, old Alice let her fast-dropping tears fall down on the dead body of the

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other twin, which she was laying out on a board, placed on a sort of sofa-settee in a corner of the room. Over the child, which yet breathed, the father bent, watching anxiously for some ground of hope, where hope there was none. Mary stepped slowly and lightly across to Alice.

"Ay, poor lad! God has taken him early, Mary."

Mary could not speak; she did not know what to say; it was so much worse than she had expected. At last she ventured to whisper.

"Is there any chance for the other one, think you?"

Alice shook her head, and told with a look that she believed there was none. She next endeavoured to lift the little body, and carry it to its old-accustomed bed in its parent's room. But earnest as the father was in watching the yet-living, he had eyes and ears for all that concerned the dead, and sprang gently up, and took his dead son on his hard couch in his arms with tender strength, and carried him upstairs as if afraid of wakening him.

The other child gasped longer, louder, with more of effort.

"We mun get him away from his mother. He cannot die while she's wishing him."

"Wishing him?" said Mary, in a tone of inquiry.

"Ay; donno ye know what wishing means? There's none can die in the arms of those who are wishing them sore to stay on earth. The soul o' them as holds them won't let the dying soul go free; so it has a hard struggle for the quiet of death. We mun get him away fra' his mother, or he'll have a hard death, poor lile [1] fellow."

So without circumlocution she went and offered to take the sinking child. But the mother would not let him go, and looking in Alice's face with brimming and imploring eyes, declared in earnest whispers, that she was not wishing him, that she would fain have him released from his suffering. Alice and Mary stood by with eyes fixed on the poor child, whose struggles seemed to increase, till at last his mother said with a choking voice,

"May happen [2] yo'd better take him, Alice; I believe my heart's wishing him a' this while, for I cannot, no, I cannot bring myself to let my two childer go in one day; I cannot help longing to keep him, and yet he sha'nt suffer longer for me."

[1] "Lile," a north-country word for "little."

"Wit *leil* labour to live."—*Piers Ploughman.*

[2] "May happen," perhaps.

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She bent down, and fondly, oh! with what passionate fondness, kissed her child, and then gave him up to Alice, who took him with tender care. Nature's struggles were soon exhausted, and he breathed his little life away in peace.

Then the mother lifted up her voice and wept. Her cries brought her husband down to try with his aching heart to comfort hers. Again Alice laid out the dead, Mary helping with reverent fear. The father and mother carried him upstairs to the bed, where his little brother lay in calm repose.

Mary and Alice drew near the fire, and stood in quiet sorrow for some time. Then Alice broke the silence by saying,

"It will be bad news for Jem, poor fellow, when he comes home."

"Where is he?" asked Mary.

"Working over-hours at th' shop. They'n getten a large order fra forrin parts; and yo' know, Jem mun work, though his heart's well-nigh breaking for these poor laddies."

Again they were silent in thought, and again Alice spoke first.

"I sometimes think the Lord is against planning. Whene'er I plan over-much, He is sure to send and mar all my plans, as if He would ha' me put the future into His hands. Afore Christmas-time I was as full as full could be of going home for good and all; yo' han heard how I've wished it this terrible long time. And a young lass from behind Burton came into place in Manchester last Martinmas; so after awhile, she had a Sunday out, and she comes to me, and tells me some cousins o' mine bid her find me out, and say how glad they should be to ha' me to bide wi' em, and look after th' childer, for they'n getten a big farm, and she's a deal to do among th' cows. So many a winter's night did I lie awake and think, that please God, come summer, I'd bid George and his wife good-bye, and go home at last. Little did I think how God Almighty would baulk me, for not leaving my days in His hands, who had led me through the wilderness hitherto. Here's George out o' work, and more cast down than ever I seed him; wanting every chip o' comfort he can get, e'en afore this last heavy stroke; and now I'm thinking the Lord's finger points very clear to my fit abiding place; and I'm sure if George and Jane can say 'His will be done,' it's no more than what I'm beholden to do."

So saying, she fell to tidying the room, removing as much as she could every vestige of sickness; making up the fire, and setting on the kettle for a cup of tea for her sister-in-law, whose

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low moans and sobs were occasionally heard in the room below.

Mary helped her in all these little offices. They were busy in this way when the door was softly opened, and Jem came in, all grimed and dirty from his night-work, his soiled apron wrapped round his middle, in guise and apparel in which he would have been sorry at another time to have been seen by Mary. But just now he hardly saw her; he went straight up to Alice, and asked how the little chaps were. They had been a shade better at dinner-time, and he had been working away through the long afternoon, and far into the night, in the belief that they had taken the turn. He had stolen out during the half-hour allowed at the works for tea, to buy them an orange or two, which now puffed out his jacket-pocket.

He would make his aunt speak: he would not understand her shakes of the head and fast-coursing fears.

"They're both gone," said she.

"Dead!"

"Ay! poor fellows. They took worse about two o'clock. Joe went first, as easy as a lamb, and Will died harder like."

"Both!"

"Ay, lad! both. The Lord has ta'en them from some evil to come, or He would na ha' made choice o' them. Ye may rest sure o' that."

Jem went to the cupboard, and quietly extricated from his pocket the oranges he had bought. But he stayed long there, and at last his sturdy frame shook with his strong agony. The two women were frightened, as women always are, on witnessing a man's overpowering grief. They cried afresh in company. Mary's heart melted within her as she witnessed Jem's sorrow, and she stepped gently up to the corner where he stood, with his back turned to them, and putting her hand softly on his arm, said,

"Oh, Jem, don't give way so; I cannot bear to see you."

Jem felt a strange leap of joy in his heart, and knew the power she had of comforting him. He did not speak, as though fearing to destroy by sound or motion the happiness of that moment, when her soft hand's touch thrilled through his frame, and her silvery voice was whispering tenderness in his ear. Yes! it might be very wrong; he could almost hate himself for it; with death and woe so surrounding him, it yet was happiness, was bliss, to be so spoken to by Mary.

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"Don't, Jem, please don't," whispered she again, believing that his silence was only another form of grief.

He could not contain himself. He took her hand in his firm yet trembling grasp, and said, in tones that instantly produced a revulsion in her mood,

"Mary, I almost loathe myself when I feel I would not give up this minute, when my brothers lie dead, and father and mother are in such trouble, for all my life that's past and gone. And, Mary (as she tried to release her hand), you know what makes me feel so blessed."

She did know—he was right there. But as he turned to catch a look at her sweet face, he saw that it expressed unfeigned distress, almost amounting to vexation; a dread of him, that he thought was almost repugnance.

He let her hand go, and she quickly went away to Alice's side.

"Fool that I was—nay, wretch that I was—to let myself take this time of trouble to tell her how I loved her; no wonder that she turns away from such a selfish beast."

Partly to relieve her from his presence, and partly from natural desire, and partly, perhaps, from a penitent wish to share to the utmost his parents' sorrow, he soon went upstairs to the chamber of death.

Mary mechanically helped Alice in all the duties she performed through the remainder of that long night, but she did not see Jem again. He remained upstairs until after the early dawn showed Mary that she need have no fear of going home through the deserted and quiet streets, to try and get a little sleep before work-hour. So leaving kind messages to George and Jane Wilson, and hesitating whether she might dare to send a few kind words to Jem, and deciding that she had better not, she stepped out into the bright morning light, so fresh a contrast to the darkened room where death had been.

"They had
Another morn than ours."

Mary lay down on her bed in her clothes; and whether it was this, or the broad daylight that poured in through the sky window, or whether it was over-excitement, it was long before she could catch a wink of sleep. Her thoughts ran on Jem's manner and words; not but what she had known the tale they told for many a day; but still she wished he had not put it so plainly.

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"Oh dear," said she to herself, "I wish he would not mistake me so; I never dare to speak a common word o' kindness, but his eye brightens and his cheek flushes. It's very hard on me; for father and George Wilson are old friends; and Jem and I ha' known each other since we were quite children. I cannot think what possesses me, that I must always be wanting to comfort him when he's downcast, and that I must go meddling wi' him to-night, when sure enough it was his aunt's place to speak to him. I don't care for him, and yet, unless I'm always watching myself, I'm speaking to him in a loving voice. I think I cannot go right, for I either check myself till I'm downright cross to him, or else I speak just natural, and that's too kind and tender by half. And I'm as good as engaged to be married to another; and another far handsomer than Jem; only I think I like Jem's face best for all that; liking's liking, and there's no help for it. Well, when I'm Mrs. Harry Carson, may happen I can put some good fortune in Jem's way. But will he thank me for it? He's rather savage at times, that I can see, and perhaps kindness from me, when I'm another's, will only go against the grain. I'll not plague myself wi' thinking any more about him, that I won't."

So she turned on her pillow, and fell asleep, and dreamt of what was often in her waking thoughts; of the day when she should ride from church in her carriage, with wedding-bells ringing, and take up her astonished father, and drive away from the old dim work-a-day court for ever, to live in a grand house, where her father should have newspapers, and pamphlets, and pipes, and meat dinners, every day,—and all day long if he liked.

Such thoughts mingled in her predilection for the handsome young Mr. Carson, who, unfettered by work-hours, let scarcely a day pass without contriving a meeting with the beautiful little milliner he had first seen while lounging in a shop where his sisters were making some purchases, and afterwards never rested till he had freely, though respectfully, made her acquaintance in her daily walks. He was, to use his own expression to himself, quite infatuated by her, and was restless each day till the time came when he had a chance, and, of late, more than a chance of meeting her. There was something of keen practical shrewdness about her, which contrasted very bewitchingly with the simple, foolish, unworldly ideas she had picked up from the romances which Miss Simmonds' young ladies were in the habit of recommending to each other.

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Yes! Mary was ambitious, and did not favour Mr. Carson the less because he was rich and a gentleman. The old leaven, infused years ago by her Aunt Esther, fermented in her little bosom, and perhaps all the more, for her father's aversion to the rich and the gentle. Such is the contrariness of the human heart, from Eve downwards, that we all, in our old Adam state, fancy things forbidden sweetest. So Mary dwelt upon and enjoyed the idea of some day becoming a lady, and doing all the elegant nothings appertaining to ladyhood. It was a comfort to her, when scolded by Miss Simmonds, to think of the day when she would drive up to the door in her own carriage, to order her gowns from the hasty-tempered yet kind dressmaker. It was a pleasure to her to hear the general admiration of the two elder Miss Carsons, acknowledged beauties in ballroom and street, on horseback and on foot, and to think of the time when she should ride and walk with them in loving sisterhood. But the best of her plans, the holiest, that which in some measure redeemed the vanity of the rest, were those relating to her father; her dear father, now oppressed with care, and always a disheartened, gloomy person. How she would surround him with every comfort she could devise (of course, he was to live with them); till he should acknowledge riches to be very pleasant things, and bless his lady-daughter! Every one who had shown her kindness in her low estate should then be repaid a hundred-fold.

Such were the castles in air, the Alnaschar-visions in which Mary indulged, and which she was doomed in after days to expiate with many tears.

Meanwhile, her words—or, even more, her tones—would maintain their hold on Jem Wilson's memory. A thrill would yet come over him when he remembered how her hand had rested on his arm. The thought of her mingled with all his grief, and it was profound, for the loss of his brothers.

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## CHAPTER VIII

" Deal gently with them, they have much endured.
Scoff not at their fond hopes and earnest plans,
Though they may seem to thee wild dreams and fancies.
Perchance, in the rough school of stern Experience,
They've something learned which Theory does not teach;
Or if they greatly err, deal gently still,
And let their error but the stronger plead
' Give us the light and guidance that we need! ' "

" LOVE THOUGHTS."

ONE Sunday afternoon, about three weeks after that mournful night, Jem Wilson set out with the ostensible purpose of calling on John Barton. He was dressed in his best, his Sunday suit of course; while his face glittered with the scrubbing he had bestowed on it. His dark black hair had been arranged and re-arranged before the household looking-glass, and in his button-hole he stuck a narcissus (a sweet Nancy is its pretty Lancashire name), hoping it would attract Mary's notice, so that he might have the delight of giving it her.

It was a bad beginning of his visit of happiness that Mary saw him some minutes before he came into her father's house. She was sitting at the end of the dresser, with the little window-blind drawn on one side, in order that she might see the passers-by, in the intervals of reading her Bible, which lay open before her. So she watched all the greeting a friend gave Jem; she saw the face of condolence, the sympathetic shake of the hand, and had time to arrange her own face and manner before Jem came in, which he did, as if he had eyes for no one but her father, who sat smoking his pipe by the fire, while he read an old *Northern Star*, borrowed from a neighbouring public-house.

Then he turned to Mary, who, he felt by the sure instinct of love, by which almost his body thought, was present. Her hands were busy adjusting her dress; a forced and unnecessary movement Jem could not help thinking. Her accost was quiet and friendly, if grave; she felt that she reddened like a rose, and wished she could prevent it, while Jem wondered if her blushes arose from fear, or anger, or love.

She was very cunning, I am afraid. She pretended to read diligently, and not to listen to a word that was said, while, in fact, she heard all sounds, even to Jem's long, deep sighs, which wrung her heart. At last she took up her Bible, and as if their

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conversation disturbed her, went upstairs to her little room. And she had scarcely spoken a word to Jem; scarcely looked at him; never noticed his beautiful sweet Nancy, which only awaited her least word of praise to be hers! He did not know —that pang was spared—that in her little dingy bedroom, stood a white jug, filled with a luxuriant bunch of early spring roses, making the whole room fragrant and bright. They were the gift of her richer lover. So Jem had to go on sitting with John Barton, fairly caught in his own trap, and had to listen to his talk, and answer him as best he might.

"There's the right stuff in this here *Star*, and no mistake. Such a right-down piece for short hours."

"At the same rate of wages as now?" asked Jem.

"Ay, ay? else where's the use? It's only taking out o' the master's pocket what they can well afford. Did I ever tell yo what th' Infirmary chap let me into, many a year agone?"

"No," said Jem, listlessly.

"Well! yo must know I were in th' Infirmary for a fever, and times were rare and bad; and there be good chaps there to a man, while he's wick,[1] whate'er they may be about cutting him up at after.[2] So when I were better o' th' fever, but weak as water, they says to me, says they, 'If yo' can write, you may stay in a week longer, and help our surgeon wi' sorting his papers; and we'll take care yo've your belly full of meat and drink. Yo'll be twice as strong in a week.' So there wanted but one word to that bargain. So I were set to writing and copying; th' writing I could do well enough, but they'd such queer ways o' spelling that I'd ne'er been used to, that I'd to look first at th' copy and then at my letters, for all the world like a cock picking up grains o' corn. But one thing startled me e'en then, and I thought I'd make bold to ask the surgeon the meaning o't. I've gotten no head for numbers, but this I know, that by *far th' greater part o' th' accidents as comed in, happened in th' last two hours o' work* when folk getten tired and careless. Th' surgeon said it were all true, and that he were going to bring that fact to light."

Jem was pondering Mary's conduct; but the pause made him aware he ought to utter some civil listening noise; so he said,

"Very true."

[1] "Wick," alive. Anglo-Saxon, cwic. "The *quick* and the dead."—*Book of Common Prayer.*

[2] "At after."

"*At after* souper goth this noble king."—*Chaucer: The Squire's Tale.*

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"Ay, it's true enough, my lad, that we're sadly over-borne, and worse will come of it afore along. Block-printers is going to strike; they'n getten a bang-up union, as won't let 'em be put upon. But there's many a thing will happen afore long, as folk don't expect. Yo may take my word for that, Jem."

Jem was very willing to take it, but did not express the curiosity he should have done. So John Barton thought he'd try another hint or two.

"Working folk won't be ground to the dust much longer. We'n a' had as much to bear as human nature can bear. So, if th' masters can't do us no good, and they say they can't, we mun try higher folk."

Still Jem was not curious. He gave up hope of seeing Mary again by her own good free will; and the next best thing would be, to be alone to think of her. So, muttering something which he meant to serve as an excuse for his sudden departure, he hastily wished John good afternoon, and left him to resume his pipe and his politics.

For three years past, trade had been getting worse and worse, and the price of provisions higher and higher. This disparity between the amount of the earnings of the working classes, and the price of their food, occasioned in more cases than could well be imagined, disease and death. Whole families went through a gradual starvation. They only wanted a Dante to record their sufferings. And yet even his words would fall short of the awful truth; they could only present an outline of the tremendous facts of the destitution that surrounded thousands upon thousands in the terrible years 1839, 1840, and 1841. Even philanthropists who had studied the subject, were forced to own themselves perplexed in the endeavour to ascertain the real causes of the misery; the whole matter was of so complicated a nature that it became next to impossible to understand it thoroughly. It need excite no surprise then to learn that a bad feeling between working-men and the upper classes became very strong in this season of privation. The indigence and sufferings of the operatives induced a suspicion in the minds of many of them, that their legislators, their magistrates, their employers, and even the ministers of religion, were, in general, their oppressors and enemies; and were in league for their prostration and enthralment. The most deplorable and enduring evil that arose out of the period of commercial depression to which I refer, was this feeling of alienation between the different classes of society. It is so impossible to describe, or

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even faintly to picture, the state of distress which prevailed in the town at that time, that I will not attempt it; and yet I think again that surely, in a Christian land, it was not known even so feebly as words could tell it, or the more happy and fortunate would have thronged with their sympathy and their aid. In many instances the sufferers wept first, and then they cursed. Their vindictive feelings exhibited themselves in rabid politics. And when I hear, as I have heard, of the sufferings and privations of the poor, or provision shops where ha'porths of tea, sugar, butter, and even flour, were sold to accommodate the indigent,—of parents sitting in their clothes by the fire-side during the whole night for seven weeks together, in order that their only bed and bedding might be reserved for the use of their large family,—of others sleeping upon the cold hearth-stone for weeks in succession, without adequate means of providing themselves with food or fuel (and this in the depth of winter),—of others being compelled to fast for days together, uncheered by any hope of better fortune, living, moreover, or rather starving, in a crowded garret, or damp cellar, and gradually sinking under the pressure of want and despair into a premature grave; and when this has been confirmed by the evidence of their careworn looks, their excited feelings, and their desolate homes,—can I wonder that many of them, in such times of misery and destitution, spoke and acted with ferocious precipitation?

An idea was now springing up among the operatives, that originated with the Chartists, but which came at last to be cherished as a darling child by many and many a one. They could not believe that government knew of their misery: they rather chose to think it possible that men could voluntarily assume the office of legislators for a nation ignorant of its real state; as who should make domestic rules for the pretty behaviour of children without caring to know that those children had been kept for days without food. Besides, the starving multitudes had heard that the very existence of their distress had been denied in Parliament; and though they felt this strange and inexplicable, yet the idea that their misery had still to be revealed in all its depths, and that then some remedy would be found, soothed their aching hearts, and kept down their rising fury.

So a petition was framed, and signed by thousands in the bright spring days of 1839, imploring Parliament to hear witnesses who could testify to the unparalleled destitution of the manufacturing districts. Nottingham, Sheffield, Glasgow, Man-

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chester, and many other towns were busy appointing delegates to convey this petition, who might speak, not merely of what they had seen and had heard, but from what they had borne and suffered. Life-worn, gaunt, anxious, hunger-stamped men, were those delegates.

One of them was John Barton. He would have been ashamed to own the flutter of spirits his appointment gave him. There was the childish delight of seeing London—that went a little way, and but a little way. There was the vain idea of speaking out his notions before so many grand folk—that went a little further; and last, there was the really pure gladness of heart arising from the idea that he was one of those chosen to be instruments in making known the distresses of the people, and consequently in procuring them some grand relief, by means of which they should never suffer want or care any more. He hoped largely, but vaguely, of the results of his expedition. An argosy of the precious hopes of many otherwise despairing creatures, was that petition to be heard concerning their sufferings.

The night before the morning on which the Manchester delegates were to leave for London, Barton might be said to hold a levée, so many neighbours came dropping in. Job Legh had early established himself and his pipe by John Barton's fire, not saying much, but puffing away, and imagining himself of use in adjusting the smoothing-irons that hung before the fire, ready for Mary when she should want them. As for Mary, her employment was the same as that of Beau Tibbs' wife, "Just washing her father's two shirts," in the pantry back-kitchen; for she was anxious about his appearance in London. (The coat had been redeemed, though the silk handkerchief was forfeited.) The door stood open, as usual, between the house-place and back-kitchen, so she gave her greeting to their friends as they entered.

"So, John, yo're bound for London, are yo?" said one.

"Ay, I suppose I mun go," answered John, yielding to necessity as it were.

"Well, there's many a thing I'd like yo to speak on to the parliament people. Thou'lt not spare 'em, John, I hope. Tell 'em our minds; how we're thinking we've been clemmed long enough, and we donnot see whatten good they'n been doing, if they can't give us what we're all crying for sin' the day we were born."

"Ay, ay! I'll tell 'em that, and much more to it, when it

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gets to my turn; but thou knows there's many will have their word afore me."

"Well, thou'lt speak at last. Bless thee, lad, do ask 'em to make th' masters break th' machines. There's never been good times sin' spinning-jennies came up."

"Machines is th' ruin of poor folk," chimed in several voices.

"For my part," said a shivering, half-clad man, who crept near the fire, as if ague-stricken, "I would like thee to tell 'em to pass th' short-hours' bill. Flesh and blood gets wearied wi' so much work; why should factory hands work so much longer nor other trades? Just ask 'em that, Barton, will ye?"

Barton was saved the necessity of answering, by the entrance of Mrs. Davenport, the poor widow he had been so kind to; she looked half-fed, and eager, but was decently clad. In her hand she brought a little newspaper parcel, which she took to Mary, who opened it, and then called out, dangling a shirt collar from her soapy fingers:

"See, father, what a dandy you'll be in London! Mrs. Davenport has brought you this; made new cut, all after the fashion.—Thank you for thinking on him."

"Eh, Mary!" said Mrs. Davenport, in a low voice. "What-ten's all I can do, to what he's done for me and mine? But, Mary, sure I can help ye, for you'll be busy wi' this journey."

"Just help me wring these out, and then I'll take 'em to th' mangle."

So Mrs. Davenport became a listener to the conversation; and after a while joined in.

"I'm sure, John Barton, if yo are taking messages to the parliament folk, yo'll not object to telling 'em what a sore trial it is, this law o' theirs, keeping childer fra' factory work, whether they be weakly or strong. There's our Ben; why, porridge seems to go no way wi' him, he eats so much; and I han gotten no money to send him t' school, as I would like; and there he is, rampaging about th' streets a' day, getting hungrier and hungrier, and picking up a' manner o' bad ways; and th' inspector won't let him in to work in th' factory, because he's not right age; though he's twice as strong as Sankey's little ritling [1] of a lad, as works till he cries for his legs aching so, though he is right age, and better."

"I've one plan I wish to tell John Barton," said a pompous, careful-speaking man, "and I should like him for to lay it afore

[1] "Ritling," probably a corruption of "ricketling," a child that suffers from the rickets—a weakling.



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the honourable house. My mother comed out o' Oxfordshire, and were under-laundry-maid in Sir Francis Dashwood's family; and when we were little ones, she'd tell us stories of their grandeur: and one thing she named were, that Sir Francis wore two shirts a day. Now he were all as one as a parliament man; and many on 'em, I han no doubt, are like extravagant. Just tell 'em, John, do, that they'd be doing th' Lancashire weavers a great kindness, if they'd ha' their shirts a' made o' calico; 'twould make trade brisk, that would, wi' the power o' shirts they wear."

Job Legh now put in his word. Taking the pipe out of his mouth, and addressing the last speaker, he said:

"I'll tell ye what, Bill, and no offence mind ye; there's but hundreds of them parliament folk as wear so many shirts to their back; but there's thousands and thousands o' poor weavers as han only gotten one shirt i' th' world; ay, and don't know where t' get another when that rag's done, though they're turning out miles o' calico every day; and many o' mile o't is lying in warehouses, stopping up trade for want o' purchasers. Yo take my advice, John Barton, and ask parliament to set trade free, so as workmen can earn a decent wage, and buy their two, ay and three, shirts a year; that would make weaving brisk."

He put his pipe in his mouth again, and redoubled his puffing to make up for lost time.

"I'm afeard, neighbours," said John Barton, "I've not much chance o' telling 'em all yo say; what I think on, is just speaking out about the distress, that they say is nought. When they hear o' children born on wet flags, without a rag t' cover 'em, or a bit o' food for th' mother; when they hear of folk lying down to die i' th' streets, or hiding their want i' some hole o' a cellar till death come to set 'em free; and when they hear o' all this plague, pestilence, and famine, they'll surely do somewhat wiser for us than we can guess at now. Howe'er, I han no objection, if so be there's an opening to speak up for what yo say; anyhow, I'll do my best, and yo see now, if better times don't come after Parliament knows all."

Some shook their heads, but more looked cheery: and then one by one dropped off, leaving John and his daughter alone.

"Didst thou mark how poorly Jane Wilson looked?" asked he, as they wound up their hard day's work by a supper eaten over the fire, which glowed and glimmered through the room, and formed their only light.

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"No, I can't say as I did. But she's never rightly held up her head since the twins died; and all along she has never been a strong woman."

"Never sin' her accident. Afore that I mind her looking as fresh and likely a girl as e'er a one in Manchester."

"What accident, father?"

"She cotched [1] her side again a wheel. It were afore wheels were boxed up. It were just when she were to have been married, and many a one thought George would ha' been off his bargain; but I knew he wern't the chap for that trick. Pretty near the first place she went to when she were able to go about again, was th' Oud Church; poor wench, all pale and limping she went up the aisle, George holding her up as tender as a mother, and walking as slow as e'er he could, not to hurry her, though there were plenty enow of rude lads to cast their jests at him and her. Her face were white like a sheet when she came in church, but afore she got to th' altar she were all one flush. But for a' that it's been a happy marriage, and George has stuck by me through life like a brother. He'll never hold up his head again if he loses Jane. I didn't like her looks to-night."

And so he went to bed, the fear of forthcoming sorrow to his friend mingling with his thoughts of to-morrow, and his hopes for the future. Mary watched him set off, with her hands over her eyes to shade them from the bright slanting rays of the morning sun, and then she turned into the house to arrange its disorder before going to her work. She wondered if she should like or dislike the evening and morning solitude; for several hours when the clock struck she thought of her father, and wondered where he was; she made good resolutions according to her lights; and by and by came the distractions and events of the broad full day to occupy her with the present, and to deaden the memory of the absent.

One of Mary's resolutions was, that she would not be persuaded or induced to see Mr. Harry Carson during her father's absence. There was something crooked in her conscience after all; for this very resolution seemed an acknowledgment that it was wrong to meet him at any time; and yet she had brought herself to think her conduct quite innocent and proper, for although unknown to her father, and certain, even did he know it, to fail of obtaining his sanction, she esteemed her love-meetings with Mr. Carson as sure to end in her father's good

[1] "Cotched," caught.

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and happiness. But now that he was away, she would do nothing that he would disapprove of; no, not even though it was for his own good in the end.

Now, amongst Miss Simmonds' young ladies was one who had been from the beginning a confidante in Mary's love affair, made so by Mr. Carson himself. He had felt the necessity of some third person to carry letters and messages, and to plead his cause when he was absent. In a girl named Sally Leadbitter he had found a willing advocate. She would have been willing to have embarked in a love-affair herself (especially a clandestine one), for the mere excitement of the thing; but her willingness was strengthened by sundry half-sovereigns, which from time to time Mr. Carson bestowed upon her.

Sally Leadbitter was vulgar-minded to the last degree; never easy unless her talk was of love and lovers; in her eyes it was an honour to have had a long list of wooers. So constituted, it was a pity that Sally herself was but a plain, red-haired, freckled girl; never likely, one would have thought, to become a heroine on her own account. But what she lacked in beauty she tried to make up for by a kind of witty boldness, which gave her what her betters would have called piquancy. Considerations of modesty or propriety never checked her utterance of a good thing. She had just talent enough to corrupt others. Her very good nature was an evil influence. They could not hate one who was so kind; they could not avoid one who was so willing to shield them from scrapes by any exertion of her own; whose ready fingers would at any time make up for their deficiencies, and whose still more convenient tongue would at any time invent for them. The Jews, or Mohammedans (I forget which), believe that there is one little bone of our body, one of the vertebræ, if I remember rightly, which will never decay and turn to dust, but will lie incorrupt and indestructible in the ground until the last day: this is the Seed of the Soul. The most depraved have also their Seed of the Holiness that shall one day overcome their evil. Their one good quality, lurking hidden, but safe, among all the corrupt and bad.

Sally's seed of the future soul was her love for her mother, an aged bed-ridden woman. For her she had self-denial; for her, her good-nature rose into tenderness; to cheer her lonely bed, her spirits, in the evenings, when her body was often woefully tired, never flagged, but were ready to recount the events of the day, to turn them into ridicule, and to mimic, with admirable fidelity, any person gifted with an absurdity who

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had fallen under her keen eye. But the mother was lightly principled like Sally herself; nor was there need to conceal from her the reason why Mr. Carson gave her so much money. She chuckled with pleasure, and only hoped that the wooing would be long a-doing.

Still neither she, nor her daughter, nor Harry Carson liked this resolution of Mary, not to see him during her father's absence.

One evening (and the early summer evenings were long and bright now), Sally met Mr. Carson by appointment, to be charged with a letter for Mary, imploring her to see him, which Sally was to back with all her powers of persuasion. After parting from him she determined, as it was not so very late, to go at once to Mary's, and deliver the message and letter.

She found Mary in great sorrow. She had just heard of George Wilson's sudden death: her old friend, her father's friend, Jem's father—all his claims came rushing upon her. Though not guarded from unnecessary sight or sound of death, as the children of the rich are, yet it had so often been brought home to her this last three or four months. It was so terrible thus to see friend after friend depart. Her father, too, who had dreaded Jane Wilson's death the evening before he set off. And she, the weakly, was left behind while the strong man was taken. At any rate the sorrow her father had so feared for him was spared. Such were the thoughts which came over her.

She could not go to comfort the bereaved, even if comfort were in her power to give; for she had resolved to avoid Jem; and she felt that this of all others was not the occasion on which she could keep up a studiously cold manner.

And in this shock of grief, Sally Leadbitter was the last person she wished to see. However, she rose to welcome her, betraying her tear-swollen face.

"Well, I shall tell Mr. Carson to-morrow how you're fretting for him; it's no more nor he's doing for you, I can tell you."

"For him, indeed!" said Mary, with a toss of her pretty head.

"Ay, miss, for him! You've been sighing as if your heart would break now for several days, over your work; now, arn't you a little goose not to go and see one who I am sure loves you as his life, and whom you love; 'How much, Mary?' 'This much,' as the children say" (opening her arms very wide).

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"Nonsense," said Mary, pouting; "I often think I don't love him at all."

"And I'm to tell him that, am I, next time I see him?" asked Sally.

"If you like," replied Mary. "I'm sure I don't care for that or anything else now;" weeping afresh.

But Sally did not like to be the bearer of any such news. She saw she had gone on the wrong tack, and that Mary's heart was too full to value either message or letter as she ought. So she wisely paused in their delivery, and said in a more sympathetic tone than she had hitherto used,

"Do tell me, Mary, what's fretting you so? You know I never could abide to see you cry."

"George Wilson's dropped down dead this afternoon," said Mary, fixing her eyes for one minute on Sally, and the next hiding her face in her apron as she sobbed anew.

"Dear, dear! All flesh is grass; here to-day and gone to-morrow, as the Bible says. Still he was an old man, and not good for much; there's better folk than him left behind. Is th' canting old maid as was his sister alive yet?"

"I don't know who you mean," said Mary, sharply; for she did know, and did not like to have her dear, simple Alice so spoken of.

"Come, Mary, don't be so innocent. Is Miss Alice Wilson alive, then; will that please you? I haven't seen her hereabouts lately."

"No, she's left living here. When the twins died, she thought she could. may be, be of use to her sister, who was sadly cast down, and Alice thought she could cheer her up; at any rate she could listen to her when her heart grew overburdened; so she gave up her cellar and went to live with them."

"Well, good go with her. I'd no fancy for her, and I'd no fancy for her making my pretty Mary into a Methodee."

"She wasn't a Methodee, she was Church o' England."

"Well, well, Mary, you're very particular. You know what I meant. Look, who is this letter from?" holding up Henry Carson's letter.

"I don't know, and don't care," said Mary, turning very red.

"My eye! as if I didn't know you did know and did care."

"Well, give it me," said Mary, impatiently, and anxious in her present mood for her visitor's departure.

Sally relinquished it unwillingly. She had, however, the

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pleasure of seeing Mary dimple and blush as she read the letter, which seemed to say the writer was not indifferent to her.

"You must tell him I can't come," said Mary, raising her eyes at last. "I have said I won't meet him while father is away, and I won't."

"But, Mary, he does so look for you. You'd be quite sorry for him, he's so put out about not seeing you. Besides, you go when your father's at home, without letting on [1] to him, and what harm would there be in going now?"

"Well, Sally! you know my answer, I won't; and I won't."

"I'll tell him to come and see you himself some evening, instead o' sending me; he'd may be find you not so hard to deal with."

Mary flashed up.

"If he dares to come here while father's away, I'll call the neighbours in to turn him out, so don't be putting him up to that."

"Mercy on us! one would think you were the first girl that ever had a lover; have you never heard what other girls do and think no shame of?"

"Hush, Sally! that's Margaret Jennings at the door."

And in an instant Margaret was in the room. Mary had begged Job Legh to let her come and sleep with her. In the uncertain fire-light you could not help noticing that she had the groping walk of a blind person.

"Well, I must go, Mary," said Sally. "And that's your last word?"

"Yes, yes; good-night." She shut the door gladly on her unwelcome visitor—unwelcome at that time at least.

"Oh, Margaret, have ye heard this sad news about George Wilson?"

"Yes, that I have. Poor creatures, they've been sore tried lately. Not that I think sudden death so bad a thing; it's easy, and there's no terrors for him as dies. For them as survives it's very hard. Poor George; he were such a hearty-looking man."

"Margaret," said Mary, who had been closely observing her friend, "thou'rt very blind to-night, artn't thou? Is it wi' crying? Your eyes are so swollen and red."

"Yes, dear! but not crying for sorrow. Han ye heard where I was last night?"

"No; where?"

[1] "Letting on," informing.

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"Look here." She held up a bright golden sovereign. Mary opened her large grey eyes with astonishment.

"I'll tell you all and how about it. You see there's a gentleman lecturing on music at th' Mechanics', and he wants folk to sing his songs. Well, last night th' counter got a sore throat and couldn't make a note. So they sent for me. Jacob Butterworth had said a good word for me, and they asked me would I sing? You may think I was frightened, but I thought now or never, and said I'd do my best. So I tried o'er the songs wi' th' lecturer, and then th' managers told me I were to make myself decent and be there by seven."

"And what did you put on?" asked Mary. "Oh, why didn't you come in for my pretty pink gingham?"

"I did think on't; but you had na come home then. No! I put on my merino, as was turned last winter, and my white shawl, and did my hair pretty tidy; it did well enough. Well, but as I was saying, I went at seven. I couldn't see to read my music, but I took th' paper in wi' me, to ha' somewhat to do wi' my fingers. Th' folks' heads danced, as I stood as right afore 'em all as if I'd been going to play at ball wi' 'em. You may guess I felt squeamish, but mine weren't the first song, and th' music sounded like a friend's voice, telling me to take courage. So to make a long story short, when it were all o'er th' lecturer thanked me, and th' managers said as how there never was a new singer so applauded (for they'd clapped and stamped after I'd done, till I began to wonder how many pair o' shoes they'd get through a week at that rate, let alone their hands). So I'm to sing again o' Thursday; and I got a sovereign last night, and am to have half-a-sovereign every night th' lecturer is at th' Mechanics.'"

"Well, Margaret, I'm right glad to hear it."

"And I don't think you've heard the best bit yet. Now that a way seemed opened to me, of not being a burden to any one, though it did please God to make me blind, I thought I'd tell grandfather. I only telled him about the singing and the sovereign last night, for I thought I'd not send him to bed wi' a heavy heart; but this morning I telled him all."

"And how did he take it?"

"He's not a man of many words; and it took him by surprise like."

"I wonder at that; I've noticed it in your ways ever since you telled me."

"Ay, that's it! If I'd not telled you, and you'd seen me

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every day, you'd not ha' noticed the little mite o' difference fra' day to day."

"Well, but what did your grandfather say?"

"Why, Mary," said Margaret, half smiling, "I'm a bit loath to tell yo, for unless yo knew grandfather's ways like me, yo'd think it strange. He were taken by surprise, and he said: 'Damn yo!' Then he began looking at his book as it were, and were very quiet, while I telled him all about it; how I'd feared, and how downcast I'd been; and how I were now reconciled to it, if it were th' Lord's will; and how I hoped to earn money by singing; and while I were talking, I saw great big tears come dropping on th' book; but in course I never let on that I saw 'em. Dear grandfather! and all day long he's been quietly moving things out o' my way, as he thought might trip me up, and putting things in my way as he thought I might want; never knowing I saw and felt what he were doing; for, yo see, he thinks I'm out and out blind, I guess—as I shall be soon."

Margaret sighed in spite of her cheerful and relieved tone.

Though Mary caught the sigh, she felt it was better to let it pass without notice, and began with the tact which true sympathy rarely fails to supply, to ask a variety of questions respecting her friend's musical début, which tended to bring out more distinctly how successful it had been.

"Why, Margaret," at length she exclaimed, "thou'lt become as famous, may be, as that grand lady fra' London, as we seed one night driving up to th' concert-room door in her carriage."

"It looks very like it," said Margaret, with a smile. "And be sure, Mary, I'll not forget to give thee a lift now an' then when that comes about. Nay, who knows, if thou'rt a good girl, but mayhappen I may make thee my lady's-maid! Wouldn't that be nice? So I e'en sing to mysel' th' beginning o' one o' my songs,

'An' ye shall walk in silk attire,
An' siller hae to spare.'"

"Nay, don't stop; or else give me something a bit more new, for somehow I never quite liked that part about thinking o' Donald mair."

"Well, though I'm a bit tir'd, I don't care if I do. Before I come, I were practising well-nigh upon two hours this one which I'm to sing o' Thursday. The lecturer said he were sure it would just suit me, and I should do justice to it; and I should be right sorry to disappoint him, he were so nice and encouraging like

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to me. Eh! Mary, what a pity there isn't more o' that way, and less scolding and rating i' th' world! It would go a vast deal further. Beside, some o' th' singers said they were a'most certain that it were a song o' his own, because he were so fidgety and particular about it, and so anxious I should give it th' proper expression. And that makes me care still more. Th' first verse, he said, were to be sung 'tenderly, but joyously!' I'm afraid I don't quite hit that, but I'll try.

'What a single word can do!
Thrilling all the heart-strings through,
Calling forth fond memories,
Raining round hope's melodies,
Steeping all in one bright hue—
What a single word can do!'

Now it falls into th' minor key, and must be very sad like. I feel as if I could do that better than t'other.

'What a single word can do!
Making life seem all untrue,
Driving joy and hope away,
Leaving not one cheering ray,
Blighting every flower that grew—
What a single word can do!'"

Margaret certainly made the most of this little song. As a factory worker, listening outside, observed, "She spun it reet[1] fine!" And if she only sang it at the Mechanics' with half the feeling she put into it that night, the lecturer must have been hard to please, if he did not admit that his expectations were more than fulfilled.

When it was ended, Mary's looks told more than words could have done what she thought of it; and partly to keep in a tear which would fain have rolled out, she brightened into a laugh, and said, "for certain, th' carriage is coming. So let us go and dream on it."

[1] "Reet," right; often used for "very."

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## CHAPTER IX

" A life of self-indulgence is for us,
A life of self-denial is for them;
For us the streets, broad-built and populous,
For them unhealthy corners, garrets dim,
And cellars where the water-rat may swim!
For us green paths refreshed by frequent rain
For them dark alleys where the dust lies grim!
Not doomed by us to this appointed pain—
God made us rich and poor—of what do these complain? "

MRS. NORTON'S " CHILD OF THE ISLANDS."

THE next evening it was a warm, pattering, incessant rain, just the rain to waken up the flowers. But in Manchester, where, alas! there are no flowers, the rain had only a disheartening and gloomy effect; the streets were wet and dirty, the drippings from the houses were wet and dirty, and the people were wet and dirty. Indeed, most kept within-doors; and there was an unusual silence of footsteps in the little paved courts.

Mary had to change some clothes after her walk home; and had hardly settled herself before she heard some one fumbling at the door. The noise continued long enough to allow her to get up and go and open it. There stood—could it be? yes it was, her father!

Drenched and way-worn, there he stood! He came in with no word to Mary in return for her cheery and astonished greeting. He sat down by the fire in his wet things, unheeding. But Mary would not let him so rest. She ran up and brought down his working-day clothes, and went into the pantry to rummage up their little bit of provision while he changed by the fire, talking all the while as gaily as she could, though her father's depression hung like lead on her heart.

For Mary, in her seclusion at Miss Simmonds',—where the chief talk was of fashions, and dress, and parties to be given, for which such and such gowns would be wanted, varied with a slight whispered interlude occasionally about love and lovers,—had not heard the political news of the day: that Parliament had refused to listen to the working-men, when they petitioned with all the force of their rough, untutored words to be heard concerning the distress which was riding, like the Conqueror on his Pale Horse, among the people; which was crushing their lives out of them, and stamping woe-marks over the land.

When he had eaten and was refreshed, they sat in silence for

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some time; for Mary wished him to tell her what oppressed him so, yet durst not ask. In this she was wise; for when we are heavy laden in our hearts, it falls in better with our humour to reveal our case in our own way, and our own time.

Mary sat on a stool at her father's feet in old childish guise, and stole her hand into his, while his sadness infected her, and she "caught the trick of grief, and sighed," she knew not why.

"Mary, we mun speak to our God to hear us, for man will not hearken; no, not now, when we weep tears o' blood."

In an instant Mary understood the fact, if not the details, that so weighed down her father's heart. She pressed his hand with silent sympathy. She did not know what to say, and was so afraid of speaking wrongly, that she was silent. But when his attitude had remained unchanged for more than half-an-hour, his eyes gazing vacantly and fixedly at the fire, no sound but now and then a deep-drawn sigh to break the weary ticking of the clock, and the drip-drop from the roof without, Mary could bear it no longer. Anything to rouse her father. Even bad news.

"Father, do you know George Wilson's dead?" (Her hand was suddenly and almost violently compressed.) "He dropped down dead in Oxford Road yester morning. It's very sad, isn't it, father?"

Her tears were ready to flow as she looked up in her father's face for sympathy. Still the same fixed look of despair, not varied by grief for the dead.

"Best for him to die," he said, in a low voice.

This was unbearable. Mary got up under pretence of going to tell Margaret that she need not come to sleep with her to-night, but really to ask Job Legh to come and cheer her father.

She stopped outside their door. Margaret was practising her singing, and through the still night air her voice rang out like that of an angel.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God."

The old Hebrew prophetic words fell like dew on Mary's heart. She could not interrupt. She stood listening and "comforted," till the little buzz of conversation again began, and then entered and told her errand.

Both grandfather and grand-daughter rose instantly to fulfil her request.

"He's just tired out, Mary," said old Job. "He'll be a different man to-morrow."

There is no describing the looks and tones that have power

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over an aching, heavy-laden heart; but in an hour or so John Barton was talking away as freely as ever, though all his talk ran, as was natural, on the disappointment of his fond hope, of the forlorn hope of many.

"Ay, London's a fine place," said he, "and finer folk live in it than I ever thought on, or ever heerd tell on except in th' story-books. They are having their good things now, that afterwards they may be tormented."

Still at the old parable of Dives and Lazarus! Does it haunt the minds of the rich as it does those of the poor?

"Do tell us all about London, dear father," asked Mary, who was sitting at her old post by her father's knee.

"How can I tell yo a' about it, when I never seed one-tenth of it. It's as big as six Manchesters, they telled me. One-sixth may be made up o' grand palaces, and three-sixths o' middling kind, and th' rest o' holes o' iniquity and filth, such as Manchester knows nought on, I'm glad to say."

"Well, father, but did you see th' queen?"

"I believe I didn't, though one day I thought I'd seen her many a time. You see," said he, turning to Job Legh, "there were a day appointed for us to go to Parliament House. We were most on us biding at a public-house in Holborn, where they did very well for us. Th' morning of taking our petition we'd such a spread for breakfast as th' queen hersel might ha' sitten down to. I suppose they thought we wanted putting in heart. There were mutton kidneys, and sausages, and broiled ham, and fried beef and onions; more like a dinner nor a breakfast. Many on our chaps though, I could see, could eat but little. Th' food stuck in their throats when they thought o' them at home, wives and little ones, as had, may be at that very time, nought to eat. Well, after breakfast, we were all set to walk in procession, and a time it took to put us in order, two and two, and the petition as was yards long, carried by th' foremost pairs. The men looked grave enough, yo may be sure; and such a set of thin, wan, wretched-looking chaps as they were!"

"Yourself is none to boast on."

"Ay, but I were fat and rosy to many a one. Well, we walked on and on through many a street, much the same as Deansgate. We had to walk slowly, slowly, for th' carriages an' cabs as thronged th' streets. I thought by and by we should may be get clear on 'em, but as the streets grew wider they grew worse, and at last we were fairly blocked up at Oxford Street. We getten across at after awhile though, and my eyes!

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the grand streets we were in then! They're sadly puzzled how to build houses though in London; there'd be an opening for a good steady master-builder there, as know'd his business. For yo see the houses are many on 'em built without any proper shape for a body to live in; some on 'em they've after thought would fall down, so they've stuck great ugly pillars out before 'em. And some on 'em (we thought they must be th' tailor's sign) had getten stone men and women as wanted clothes stuck on 'em. I were like a child, I forgot a' my errand in looking about me. By this it were dinner-time, or better, as we could tell by the sun, right above our heads, and we were dusty and tired, going a step now and a step then. Well, at last we getten into a street grander nor all, leading to th' queen's palace, and there it were I thought I saw th' queen. Yo've seen th' hearses wi' white plumes, Job?"

Job assented.

"Well, them undertaker folk are driving a pretty trade in London. Well-nigh every lady we saw in a carriage had hired one o' them plumes for the day, and had it niddle noddling on her head. It were th' queen's drawing-room, they said, and th' carriages went bowling along toward her house, some w' dressed up gentlemen like circus folk in 'em, and ruck[1] o' ladies in others. Carriages themselves were great shakes too. Some o' th' gentlemen as couldn't get inside hung on behind, wi' nosegays to smell at, and sticks to keep off folk as might splash their silk stockings. I wondered why they didn't hire a cab rather than hang on like a whip-behind boy; but I suppose they wished to keep wi' their wives, Darby and Joan like. Coachmen were little squat men, wi' wigs like th' oud-fashioned parsons. Well, we could na get on for these carriages, though we waited and waited. Th' horses were too fat to move quick; they never known want o' food, one might tell by their sleek coats; and police pushed us back when we tried to cross. One or two of 'em struck wi' their sticks, and coachmen laughed, and some officers as stood nigh put their spy-glasses in their eye, and left 'em sticking there like mountebanks. One o' th' police struck me. 'Whatten business have yo to do that?' said I.

"'You're frightening them horses,' says he, in his mincing way (for Londoners are mostly all tongue-tied, and can't say their a's and i's properly), 'and it's our business to keep you from molesting the ladies and gentlemen going to her majesty's drawing-room.'

[1] "Rucks," a great quantity.

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"'And why are we to be molested,' asked I, 'going decently about our business, which is life and death to us, and many a little one clemming at home in Lancashire? Which business is of most consequence i' the sight o' God, think yo, our'n or them gran ladies and gentlemen as yo think so much on?'

"But I might as well ha' held my peace, for he only laughed."

John ceased. After waiting a little to see if he would go on himself, Job said,

"Well, but that's not a' your story, man. Tell us what happened when yo got to th' Parliament House."

After a little pause, John answered,

"If yo please, neighbour, I'd rather say naught about that. It's not to be forgotten or forgiven either by me or many another; but I canna tell of our down-casting just as a piece of London news. As long as I live, our rejection of that day will abide in my heart; and as long as I live I shall curse them as so cruelly refused to hear us; but I'll not speak of it no [1] more."

So, daunted in their inquiries, they sat silent for a few minutes.

Old Job, however, felt that some one must speak, else all the good they had done in dispelling John Barton's gloom was lost. So after a while he thought of a subject, neither sufficiently dissonant from the last to jar on the full heart, nor too much the same to cherish the continuance of the gloomy train of thought.

"Did you ever hear tell," said he to Mary, "that I were in London once?"

"No!" said she, with surprise, and looking at Job with increased respect.

"Ay, but I were though, and Peg there too, though she minds nought about it, poor wench! You must know I had but one child, and she were Margaret's mother. I loved her above a bit, and one day when she came (standing behind me for that I should not see her blushes, and stroking my cheeks in her own coaxing way) and told me she and Frank Jennings (as was a joiner lodging near us) should be so happy if they were married, I could not find in my heart t' say her nay, though I went sick at the thought of losing her away from my home. Howe'er, she was my only child, and I never said nought of what I felt, for fear o' grieving her young heart. But I tried to think o'

[1] A similar use of a double negative is not unfrequent in Chaucer; as in the "Miller's Tale":

"That of no wife toke he non offering
For curtesie, he sayd, he n'old non."

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the time when I'd been young mysel, and had loved her blessed mother, and how we'd left father and mother and gone out into th' world together, and I'm now right thankful I held my peace, and didna fret her wi' telling her how sore I was at parting wi' her that were the light o' my eyes."

"But," said Mary, "you said the young man were a neighbour."

"Ay, so he were; and his father afore him. But work were rather slack in Manchester, and Frank's uncle sent him word o' London work and London wages, so he were to go there; and it were there Margaret was to follow him. Well, my heart aches yet at thought of those days. She so happy, and he so happy; only the poor father as fretted sadly behind their backs. They were married and stayed some days wi' me afore setting off; and I've often thought sin' Margaret's heart failed her many a time those few days, and she would fain ha' spoken; but I knew fra' mysel it were better to keep it pent up, and I never let on what I were feeling; I knew what she meant when she came kissing, and holding my hand, and all her old childish ways o' loving me. Well, they went at last. You know them two letters, Margaret?"

"Yes, sure," replied his grand-daughter.

"Well, them two were the only letters I ever had fra' her, poor lass. She said in them she were very happy, and I believe she were. And Frank's family heard he were in good work. In one o' her letters, poor thing, she ends wi' saying, 'Farewell, Grandad!' wi' a line drawn under grandad, and fra' that an' other hints I knew she were in th' family way; and I said nought, but I screwed up a little money, thinking come Whitsuntide I'd take a holiday and go and see her an' th' little one. But one day towards Whitsuntide, comed Jennings wi' a grave face, and says he, 'I hear our Frank and your Margaret's both getten the fever.' You might ha' knocked me down wi' a straw, for it seemed as if God told me what th' upshot would be. Old Jennings had gotten a letter yo see, fra' the landlady they lodged wi'; a well-penned letter, asking if they'd no friends to come and nurse them. She'd caught it first, and Frank, who was as tender o'er her as her own mother could ha' been, had nursed her till he'd caught it himsel; and she expecting her down-lying [1] every day. Well, t' make a long story short, old Jennings and I went up by that night's coach. So you see, Mary, that was the way I got to London."

[1] "Down-lying," lying-in.

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"But how was your daughter when you got there?" asked Mary, anxiously.

"She were at rest, poor wench, and so were Frank. I guessed as much when I see'd th' landlady's face, all swelled wi' crying, when she opened th' door to us. We said, 'Where are they?' and I knew they were dead, fra' her look; but Jennings didn't, as I take it; for when she showed us into a room wi' a white sheet on th' bed, and underneath it, plain to be seen, two still figures, he screeched out as if he'd been a woman.

"Yet he'd other childer and I'd none. There lay my darling, my only one. She were dead, and there were no one to love me, no not one. I disremember [1] rightly what I did; but I know I were very quiet, while my heart were crushed within me.

"Jennings could na' stand being in th' room at all, so the landlady took him down, and I were glad to be alone. It grew dark while I sat there; and at last th' landlady came up again, and said, 'Come here.' So I got up, and walked into th' light, but I had to hold by th' stair-rails, I were so weak and dizzy. She led me into a room, where Jennings lay on a sofa fast asleep, wi' his pocket-handkercher over his head for a nightcap. She said he'd cried himself fairly off to sleep. There were tea on th' table all ready; for she were a kind-hearted body. But she still said, 'Come here,' and took hold o' my arm. So I went round the table and there were a clothes-basket by th' fire, wi' a shawl put o'er it. 'Lift that up,' says she, and I did; and there lay a little wee babby fast asleep. My heart gave a leap, and th' tears comed rushing into my eyes first time that day. 'Is it hers?' said I, though I knew it were. 'Yes,' said she. 'She were getting a bit better o' the fever, and th' babby were born; and then the poor young man took worse and died, and she were not many hours behind.'

"Little mite of a thing! and yet it seemed her angel come back to comfort me. I were quite jealous o' Jennings, whenever he went near the babby. I thought it were more my flesh and blood than his'n, and yet I were afeard he would claim it. However, that were far enough fra' his thoughts; he'd plenty other childer, and as I found out at after he'd all along been wishing me to take it. Well, we buried Margaret and her husband in a big, crowded, lonely churchyard in London. I were loath to leave them there, as I thought, when they rose again, they'd feel so strange at first away fra Manchester, and all old friends; but it couldna be helped. Well, God watches

[1] "Disremember," forget.



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o'er their graves there as well as here. That funeral cost a mint o' money, but Jennings and I wished to do th' thing decent. Then we'd the stout little babby to bring home. We'd not overmuch money left; but it were fine weather, and we thought we'd take th' coach to Brummagem, and walk on. It were a bright May morning when I last saw London town, looking back from a big hill a mile or two off. And in that big mass o' a place I were leaving my blessed child asleep—in her last sleep. Well, God's will be done! She's gotten to hcaven afore me; but I shall get there at last, please God, though it's a long while first.

"The babby had been fed afore we set out, and th' coach moving kept it asleep, bless its little heart. But when th' coach stopped for dinner it were awake, and crying for its pobbies.[1] So we asked for some bread and milk, and Jennings took it first for to feed it; but it made its mouth like a square, and let it run out at each o' th' four corners. 'Shake it, Jennings,' says I; 'that's the way they make water run through a funnel, when it's o'er full; and a child's mouth is broad end o' th' funnel, and th' gullet the narrow one.' So he shook it, but it only cried th' more. 'Let me have it,' says I, thinking he were an awkward oud chap. But it were just as bad wi' me. By shaking th' babby we got better nor a gill into its mouth, but more nor that came up again, wetting a' th' nice dry clothes landlady had put on. Well, just as we'd gotten to th' dinner-table and helped oursels, and eaten two mouthful, came in th' guard, and a fine chap wi' a sample o' calico flourishing in his hand. 'Coach is ready!' says one; 'Half-a-crown your dinner!' says th' other. Well, we thought it a deal for both our dinners, when we'd hardly tasted 'em; but, bless your life, it were half-a-crown apiece, and a shilling for th' bread and milk as were possetted all over babby's clothes. We spoke up again[2] it; but everybody said it were the rule, so what could two poor oud chaps like us do again it? Well, poor babby cried without stopping to take breath, fra' that time till we got to Brummagem for the night. My heart ached for th' little thing. It caught wi' its wee mouth at our coat sleeves and at our mouths, when we tried t' comfort it by talking to it. Poor little wench! It wanted it's mammy, as were lying cold in th' grave. 'Well,' says I, 'it'll be clemmed to death, if it lets

[1] "Pobbies," or "pobs," child's porridge.
[2] "Again," for against. "He that is not with me, he is ageyn me."—*Wickliffe's Version.*

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out its supper as it did its dinner. Let's get some woman to feed it; it comes natural to women to do for babbies. So we asked th' chamber-maid at the inn, and she took quite kindly to it; and we got a good supper, and grew rare and sleepy, what wi' th' warmth, and wi' our long ride in th' open air. Th' chamber-maid said she would like t' have it to sleep wi' her, only missis would scold so; but it looked so quiet and smiling like, as it lay in her arms, that we thought 'twould be no trouble to have it wi' us. I says: 'See, Jennings, how women-folk do quieten babbies; it's just as I said.' He looked grave; he were always thoughtful-looking, though I never heard him say anything very deep. At last says he—

"'Young woman! have you gotten a spare nightcap?'

"'Missis always keeps night-caps for gentlemen as does not like to unpack,' says she, rather quick.

"'Ay, but young woman, it's one of your nightcaps I want. Th' babby seems to have taken a mind to yo; and maybe in th' dark it might take me for yo if I'd getten your nightcap on.'

"The chambermaid smirked and went for a cap, but I laughed outright at th' oud bearded chap thinking he'd make hissel like a woman just by putting on a woman's cap. How-e'er he'd not be laughed out on't, so I held th' babby till he were in bed. Such a night as we had on it! Babby began to scream o' th' oud fashion, and we took it turn and turn about to sit up and rock it. My heart were very sore for th' little one, as it groped about wi' its mouth; but for a' that I could scarce keep fra' smiling at th' thought o' us two oud chaps, th' one wi' a woman's nightcap on, sitting on our hinder ends for half th' night, hushabying a babby as wouldn't be hushabied. Toward morning, poor little wench! it fell asleep, fairly tired out wi' crying, but even in its sleep it gave such pitiful sobs, quivering up fra' the very bottom of its little heart, that once or twice I almost wished it lay on its mother's breast, at peace for ever. Jennings fell asleep too; but I began for to reckon up our money. It were little enough we had left, our dinner the day afore had ta'en so much. I didn't know what our reckoning would be for that night lodging, and supper, and breakfast. Doing a sum alway sent me asleep ever sin' I were a lad; so I fell sound, in a short time, and were only wakened by chambermaid tapping at th' door, to say she'd dress the babby afore her missis were up if we liked. But bless yo', we'd never thought o' undressing it th' night afore, and now it were sleeping so sound, and we were so glad o' the peace and quiet-

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ness, that we thought it were no good to waken it up to screech again.

"Well! (there's Mary asleep for a good listener!) I suppose you're getting weary of my tale, so I'll not be long over ending it. Th' reckoning left us very bare, and we thought we'd best walk home, for it were only sixty mile, they telled us, and not stop again for nought, save victuals. So we left Brummagem (which is as black a place as Manchester, without looking so like home), and walked a' that day carrying babby, turn and turn about. It were well fed by chambermaid afore we left, and th' day were fine, and folk began to have some knowledge o' th' proper way o' speaking, and we were more cheery at thought o' home (though mine, God knows, were lonesome enough). We stopped none for dinner, but at baggin-time [1] we getten a good meal at a public-house, an' fed th' babby as well as we could, but that were but poorly. We got a crust too, for it to suck—chambermaid put us up to that. That night, whether we were tired or whatten, I don't know, but it were dree [2] work, and th' poor little wench had slept out her sleep, and began th' cry as wore my heart out again. Says Jennings, says he,

"'We should na ha' set out so like gentlefolk a top o' the coach yesterday.'

"'Nay, lad! We should ha' had more to walk, if we had na ridden, and I'm sure both you and I'se [3] weary o' tramping.'

"So he were quiet a bit. But he were one o' them as were sure to find out somewhat had been done amiss when there were no going back to undo it. So presently he coughs, as if he were going to speak, and I says to mysel, 'At it again, my lad.' Says he,

"'I ax pardon, neighbour, but it strikes me it would ha' been better for my son if he had never begun to keep company wi' your daughter.'

"Well! that put me up, and my heart got very full, and but that I were carrying *her* babby, I think I should ha' struck him. At last I could hold in no longer, and says I,

"'Better say at once it would ha' been better for God never to ha' made th' world, for then we'd never ha' been in it, to have had th' heavy hearts we have now.'

[1] "Baggin-time," time of the evening meal.

[2] "Dree," long and tedious. Anglo-Saxon, "dreogan," to suffer, to endure.

[3] "I have not been, nor *is*, nor never schal."—*Wickliffe's Apology*," p. x.

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"Well! he said that were rank blasphemy; but I thought his way of casting up again th' events God had pleased to send, were worse blasphemy. Howe'er, I said nought more angry, for th' little babby's sake, as were th' child o' his dead son, as well as o' my dead daughter.

"Th' longest lane will have a turning, and that night came to an end at last; and we were foot-sore and tired enough, and to my mind th' babby were getting weaker and weaker, and it wrung my heart to hear its little wail; I'd ha' given my right hand for one of yesterday's hearty cries. We were wanting our breakfasts, and so were it too, motherless babby! We could see no public-house, so about six o'clock (only we thought it were later) we stopped at a cottage where a woman were moving about near th' open door. Says I, 'Good woman, may we rest us a bit?' 'Come in,' says she, wiping a chair, as looked bright enough afore, wi' her apron. It were a cheery, clean room; and we were glad to sit down again, though I thought my legs would never bend at th' knees. In a minute she fell a noticing th' babby, and took it in her arms, and kissed it again and again. 'Missis,' says I, 'we're not without money, and if yo'd give us somewhat for breakfast, we'd pay yo honest, and if yo would wash and dress that poor babby, and get some pobbies down its throat, for its well-nigh clemmed, I'd pray for yo' till my dying day.' So she said nought, but gived me th' babby back, and afore yo' could say Jack Robinson, she'd a pan on th' fire, and bread and cheese on th' table. When she turned round, her face looked red, and her lips were tight pressed together. Well! we were right down glad on our breakfast, and God bless and reward that woman for her kindness that day; she fed th' poor babby as gently and softly, and spoke to it as tenderly as its own poor mother could ha' done. It seemed as if that stranger and it had known each other afore, maybe in Heaven, where folk's spirits come from they say; th' babby looked up so lovingly in her eyes, and made little noises more like a dove than ought else. Then she undressed it (poor darling! it were time), touching it so softly; and washed it from head to foot, and as many on its clothes were dirty; and what bits o' things its mother had gotten ready for it had been sent by th' carrier fra London, she put 'em aside; and wrapping little naked babby in her apron, she pulled out a key, as were fastened to a black ribbon, and hung down her breast, and unlocked a drawer in th' dresser. I were sorry to be prying, but I could na' help seeing in that drawer some little

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child's clothes, all strewed wi' lavender, and lying by 'em a little whip an' a broken rattle. I began to have an insight into that woman's heart then. She took out a thing or two; and locked the drawer, and went on dressing babby. Just about then come her husband down, a great big fellow as didn't look half awake, though it were getting late; but he'd heard all as had been said downstairs, as were plain to be seen; but he were a gruff chap. We'd finished our breakfast, and Jennings were looking hard at th' woman as she were getting the babby to sleep wi' a sort of rocking way. At length says he, 'I ha learnt th' way now; it's two jiggits and a shake, two jiggits and a shake. I can get that babby asleep now mysel.'

"The man had nodded cross enough to us, and had gone to th' door, and stood there whistling wi' his hands in his breeches-pockets, looking abroad. But at last he turns and says, quite sharp,

"'I say, missis, I'm to have no breakfast to-day, I 'spose.'

"So wi' that she kissed th' child, a long, soft kiss; and looking in my face to see if I could take her meaning, gave me th' babby without a word. I were loath to stir, but I saw it were better to go. So giving Jennings a sharp nudge (for he'd fallen asleep), I says, 'Missis, what's to pay?' pulling out my money wi' a jingle that she might na guess we were at all bare o' cash. So she looks at her husband, who said ne'er a word, but were listening wi' all his ears nevertheless; and when she saw he would na say, she said, hesitating, as if pulled two ways, by her fear o' him, 'Should you think sixpence over much?' It were so different to public-house reckoning, for we'd eaten a main deal afore the chap came down. So says I, 'And, missis, what should we gie you for the babby's bread and milk?' (I had it once in my mind to say 'and for a' your trouble with it,' but my heart would na let me say it, for I could read in her ways how it had been a work o' love.) So says she, quite quick, and stealing a look at her husband's back, as looked all ear, if ever a back did, 'Oh, we could take nought for the little babby's food, if it had eaten twice as much, bless it.' Wi' that he looked at her; such a scowling look! She knew what he meant, and stepped softly across the floor to him, and put her hand on his arm. He seem'd as though he'd shake it off by a jerk on his elbow, but she said quite low, 'For poor little Johnnie's sake, Richard.' He did not move or speak again, and after looking in his face for a minute, she turned away, swallowing deep in her

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throat. She kissed th' sleeping babby as she passed, when I paid her. To quieten th' gruff husband, and stop him if he rated her, I could na help slipping another sixpence under th' loaf, and then we set off again. Last look I had o' that woman she were quietly wiping her eyes wi' the corner of her apron, as she went about her husband's breakfast. But I shall know her in heaven."

He stopped to think of that long-ago May morning, when he had carried his grand-daughter under the distant hedge-rows and beneath the flowering sycamores.

"There's nought more to say, wench," said he to Margaret, as she begged him to go on. "That night we reached Manchester, and I'd found out that Jennings would be glad enough to give up babby to me, so I took her home at once, and a blessing she's been to me."

They were all silent for a few minutes; each following out the current of their thoughts. Then, almost simultaneously, their attention fell upon Mary. Sitting on her little stool, her head resting on her father's knee, and sleeping as soundly as any infant, her breath (still like an infant's) came and went as softly as a bird steals to her leafy nest. Her half-open mouth was as scarlet as the winter-berries, and contrasted finely with the clear paleness of her complexion, where the eloquent blood flushed carnation at each emotion. Her black eyelashes lay on the delicate cheek, which was still more shaded by the masses of her golden hair, that seemed to form a nest-like pillow for her as she lay. Her father in fond pride straightened one glossy curl, for an instant, as if to display its length and silkiness. The little action awoke her, and, like nine out of ten people in similar circumstances, she exclaimed, opening her eyes to their fullest extent,

"I'm not asleep. I've been awake all the time."

Even her father could not keep from smiling, and Job Legh and Margaret laughed outright.

"Come, wench," said Job, "don't look so gloppened [1] because thou'st fallen asleep while an oud chap like me was talking on oud times. It were like enough to send thee to sleep. Try if thou canst keep thine eyes open while I read thy father a bit on a poem as is written by a weaver like oursel. A rare chap I'll be bound is he who could weave verse like this."

So adjusting his spectacles on nose, cocking his chin, crossin

[1] "Gloppened," amazed, frightened.

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his legs, and coughing to clear his voice, he read aloud a little poem of Samuel Bamford's [1] he had picked up somewhere.

God help the poor, who, on this wintry morn,
  Come forth from alleys dim and courts obscure.
God help yon poor pale girl, who droops forlorn,
  And meekly her affliction doth endure;
God help her, outcast lamb; she trembling stands,
All wan her lips, and frozen red her hands;
Her sunken eyes are modestly down-cast,
Her night-black hair streams on the fitful blast;
Her bosom, passing fair, is half revealed,
And oh! so cold, the snow lies there congealed;
Her feet benumbed, her shoes all rent and worn,
God help thee, outcast lamb, who stand'st forlorn!
  God help the poor!

God help the poor! An infant's feeble wail
  Comes from yon narrow gateway, and behold!
A female crouching there, so deathly pale,
  Huddling her child, to screen it from the cold;
Her vesture scant, her bonnet crushed and torn;
  A thin shawl doth her baby dear enfold:
And so she 'bides the ruthless gale of morn,
  Which almost to her heart hath sent its cold.
And now she, sudden, darts a ravening look,
As one, with new hot bread, goes past the nook;
And, as the tempting load is onward borne,
She weeps. God help thee, helpless one, forlorn!
  God help the poor!

God help the poor! Behold yon famished lad,
  No shoes, nor hose, his wounded feet protect;
With limping gait, and looks so dreamy sad,
  He wanders on, stopping to inspect
Each window, stored with articles of food.
  He yearns but to enjoy one cheering meal;
Oh! to the hungry palate, viands rude,
  Would yield a zest the famished only feel!
He now devours a crust of mouldy bread;
  With teeth and hands the precious boon is torn;
Unmindful of the storm that round his head
  Impetuous sweeps. God help thee, child forlorn!
  God help the poor!

God help the poor! Another have I found—
  A bowed and venerable man is he;
His slouched hat with faded crape is bound;
  His coat is grey, and threadbare too, I see.
"The rude winds" seem "to mock his hoary hair;"
His shirtless bosom to the blast is bare.
Anon he turns and casts a wistful eye,
  And with scant napkin wipes the blinding spray,
And looks around, as if he fain would spy
  Friends he had feasted in his better day:
Ah! some are dead; and some have long forborne
To know the poor; and he is left forlorn!
  God help the poor!

[1] The fine-spirited author of *Passages in the Life of a Radical*—a man who illustrates his order, and shows what nobility may be in a cottage.

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God help the poor, who in lone valleys dwell,
Or by far hills, where whin and heather grow;
Theirs is a story sad indeed to tell,
Yet little cares the world, and less 'twould know
About the toil and want men undergo.
The wearying loom doth call them up at morn,
The work till worn-out nature sinks to sleep,
They taste, but are not fed. The snow drifts deep
Around the fireless cot, and blocks the door;
The night-storm howls a dirge across the moor;
And shall they perish thus—oppressed and lorn?
Shall toil and famine, hopeless, still be borne?
No! God will yet arise, and help the poor.

"Amen!" said Barton, solemnly and sorrowfully. "Mary! wench, couldst thee copy me them lines, dost think?—that's to say, if Job there has no objection."

"Not I. More they're heard and read and the better, say I."

So Mary took the paper. And the next day, on the blank half sheet of a valentine, all bordered with hearts and darts—a valentine she had once suspected to come from Jem Wilson—she copied Bamford's beautiful little poem.

## CHAPTER X

"My heart, once soft as woman's tear, is gnarled
With gloating on the ills I cannot cure."

ELLIOTT.

"Then guard and shield her innocence,
Let her not fall like me;
'Twere better, oh! a thousand times,
She in her grave should be."

THE OUTCAST.

DESPAIR settled down like a heavy cloud; and now and then, through the dead calm of sufferings, came pipings of stormy winds, foretelling the end of these dark prognostics. In times of sorrowful or fierce endurance, we are often soothed by the mere repetition of old proverbs which tell the experience of our forefathers; but now, "it's a long lane that has no turning," "the weariest day draws to an end," etc., seemed false and vain sayings, so long and so weary was the pressure of the terrible times. Deeper and deeper still sank the poor; it showed how much lingering suffering it takes to kill men, that so few (in comparison) died during those times. But remember! we only miss those who do men's work in their humble sphere; the aged, the feeble, the children, when they die, are hardly

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noted by the world; and yet to many hearts, their deaths make a blank which long years will never fill up. Remember, too, that though it may take much suffering to kill the able-bodied and effective members of society, it does *not* take much to reduce them to worn, listless, diseased creatures, who thence-forward crawl through life with moody hearts and pain-stricken bodies.

The people had thought the poverty of the preceding years hard to bear, and had found its yoke heavy; but this year added sorely to its weight. Former times had chastised them with whips, but this chastised them with scorpions.

Of course, Barton had his share of mere bodily sufferings. Before he had gone up to London on his vain errand, he had been working short time. But in the hopes of speedy redress by means of the interference of Parliament, he had thrown up his place; and now, when he asked leave to resume his work, he was told they were diminishing their number of hands every week, and he was made aware by the remarks of fellow workmen, that a Chartist delegate, and a leading member of a trades' union, was not likely to be favoured in his search after employment. Still he tried to keep up a brave heart concerning himself. He knew he could bear hunger; for that power of endurance had been called forth when he was a little child, and had seen his mother hide her daily morsel to share it among her children, and when he, being the eldest, had told the noble lie, that "he was not hungry, could not eat a bit more," in order to imitate his mother's bravery, and still the sharp wail of the younger infants. Mary, too, was secure of two meals a day at Miss Simmonds'; though by the way, the dressmaker, too, feeling the effect of bad times, had left off giving tea to her apprentices, setting them the example of long abstinence by putting off her own meal until work was done for the night, however late that might be.

But the rent! It was half-a-crown a week—nearly all Mary's earnings—and much less room might do for them, only two.—(Now came the time to be thankful that the early dead were saved from the evil to come.)—The agricultural labourer generally has strong local attachments; but they are far less common, almost obliterated, among the inhabitants of a town. Still there are exceptions, and Barton formed one. He had removed to his present house just after the last bad times, when little Tom had sickened and died. He had then thought the bustle of a removal would give his poor stunned wife something

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to do, and he had taken more interest in the details of the proceeding than he otherwise would have done, in the hope of calling her forth to action again. So he seemed to know every brass-headed nail, driven up for her convenience. Only one had been displaced. It was Esther's bonnet nail, which, in his deep revengeful anger against her, after his wife's death, he had torn out of the wall, and cast into the street. It would be hard work to leave the house, which yet seemed hallowed by his wife's presence in the happy days of old. But he was a law unto himself, though sometimes a bad, fierce law; and he resolved to give the rent-collector notice, and look out for a cheaper abode, and tell Mary they must flit. Poor Mary! she loved the house, too. It was wrenching up her natural feelings of home, for it would be long before the fibres of her heart would gather themselves about another place.

This trial was spared. The collector (of himself), on the very Monday when Barton planned to give him notice of his intention to leave, lowered the rent threepence a week, just enough to make Barton compromise and agree to stay on a little longer.

But by degrees the house was stripped of all its little ornaments. Some were broken; and the odd twopences and threepences, wanted to pay for their repairs, were required for the far sterner necessity of food. And by and by Mary began to part with other superfluities at the pawn-shop. The smart tea-tray, and tea-caddy, long and carefully kept, went for bread for her father. He did not ask for it, or complain, but she saw hunger in his shrunk, fierce, animal look. Then the blankets went, for it was summer time, and they could spare them; and their sale made a fund, which Mary fancied would last till better times came. But it was soon all gone; and then she looked around the room to crib it of its few remaining ornaments. To all these proceedings her father said never a word. If he fasted, or feasted (after the sale of some article), on an unusual meal of bread and cheese, he took all with a sullen indifference, which depressed Mary's heart. She often wished he would apply for relief from the guardians' relieving office; often wondered the trades' union did nothing for him. Once when she asked him as he sat, grimed, unshaven, and gaunt, after a day's fasting over the fire, why he did not get relief from the town, he turned round, with grim wrath, and said, "I don't want money, child! D—n their charity and their money! I want work, and it is my right. I want work."

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He would bear it all, he said to himself. And he did bear it, but not meekly; that was too much to expect. Real meekness of character is called out by experience of kindness. And few had been kind to him. Yet through it all, with stern determination he refused the assistance his trades' union would have given him. It had not much to give, but with worldly wisdom, thought it better to propitiate an active, useful member, than to help those who were more unenergetic, though they had large families to provide for. Not so thought John Barton. With him need was right.

"Give it to Tom Darbyshire," he said. "He's more claim on it than me, for he's more need of it, with his seven children."

Now Tom Darbyshire was, in his listless, grumbling way, a backbiting enemy of John Barton's. And he knew it; but he was not to be influenced by that in a matter like this.

Mary went early to her work; but her cheery laugh over it was now missed by the other girls. Her mind wandered over the present distress, and then settled, as she stitched, on the visions of the future, where yet her thoughts dwelt more on the circumstances of ease, and the pomps and vanities awaiting her, than on the lover with whom she was to share them. Still she was not insensible to the pride of having attracted one so far above herself in station; not insensible to the secret pleasure of knowing that he, whom so many admired, had often said he would give anything for one of her sweet smiles. Her love for him was a bubble, blown out of vanity; but it looked very real and very bright. Sally Leadbitter, meanwhile, keenly observed the signs of the times; she found out that Mary had begun to affix a stern value to money as the "Purchaser of Life," and many girls had been dazzled and lured by gold, even without the betraying love which she believed to exist in Mary's heart. So she urged young Mr. Carson, by representations of the want she was sure surrounded Mary, to bring matters more to a point. But he had a kind of instinctive dread of hurting Mary's pride of spirit, and durst not hint his knowledge in any way of the distress that many must be enduring. He felt that for the present he must still be content with stolen meetings and summer evening strolls, and the delight of pouring sweet honeyed words into her ear, while she listened with a blush and a smile that made her look radiant with beauty. No, he would be cautious in order to be certain; for Mary one way, or another, he must make his. He had no doubt of the effect

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of his own personal charms in the long run; for he knew he was handsome, and believed himself fascinating.

If he had known what Mary's home was, he would not have been so much convinced of his increasing influence over her, by her being more and more ready to linger with him in the sweet summer air. For when she returned for the night her father was often out, and the house wanted the cheerful look it had had in the days when money was never wanted to purchase soap and brushes, black-lead and pipe-clay. It was dingy and comfortless; for, of course, there was not even the dumb familiar home-friend, a fire. And Margaret, too, was now so often from home, singing at some of those grand places. And Alice; oh, Mary wished she had never left her cellar to go and live at Ancoats with her sister-in-law. For in that matter Mary felt very guilty; she had put off and put off going to see the widow after George Wilson's death from dread of meeting Jem, or giving him reason to think she wished to be as intimate with him as formerly; and now she was so much ashamed of her delay that she was likely never to go at all.

If her father was at home it was no better; indeed it was worse. He seldom spoke, less than ever; and often when he did speak they were sharp angry words, such as he had never given her formerly. Her temper was high, too, and her answers not over-mild; and once in his passion he had even beaten her. If Sally Leadbitter or Mr. Carson had been at hand at that moment, Mary would have been ready to leave home for ever. She sat alone, after her father had flung out of the house, bitterly thinking on the days that were gone; angry with her own hastiness, and believing that her father did not love her; striving to heap up one painful thought on another. Who cared for her? Mr. Carson might, but in this grief that seemed no comfort. Mother dead! Father so often angry, so lately cruel (for it was a hard blow, and blistered and reddened Mary's soft white skin with pain): and then her heart turned round, and she remembered with self-reproach how provokingly she had looked and spoken, and how much her father had to bear; and oh, what a kind and loving parent he had been, till these days of trial. The remembrance of one little instance of his fatherly love thronged after another into her mind, and she began to wonder how she could have behaved to him as she had done.

Then he came home; and but for very shame she would have confessed her penitence in words. But she looked sullen, from

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her effort to keep down emotion; and for some time her father did not know how to begin to speak. At length he gulped down pride, and said:

"Mary, I'm not above saying I'm very sorry I beat thee. Thou wert a bit aggravating, and I'm not the man I was. But it were wrong, and I'll try never to lay hands on thee again."

So he held out his arms, and in many tears she told him her repentance for her fault. He never struck her again.

Still, he often was angry. But that was almost better than being silent. Then he sat near the fire-place (from habit), smoking, or chewing opium. Oh, how Mary loathed that smell! And in the dusk, just before it merged into the short summer night, she had learned to look with dread towards the window, which now her father would have kept uncurtained; for there were not seldom seen sights which haunted her in her dreams. Strange faces of pale men, with dark glaring eyes, peered into the inner darkness, and seemed desirous to ascertain if her father were at home. Or a hand and arm (the body hidden) was put within the door, and beckoned him away. He always went. And once or twice, when Mary was in bed, she heard men's voices below, in earnest, whispered talk.

They were all desperate members of trades' unions, ready for anything; made ready by want.

While all this change for gloom yet struck fresh and heavy on Mary's heart, her father startled her out of a reverie one evening, by asking her when she had been to see Jane Wilson. From his manner of speaking, she was made aware that he had been; but at the time of his visit he had never mentioned anything about it. Now, however, he gruffly told her to go next day without fail, and added some abuse of her for not having been before. The little outward impulse of her father's speech gave Mary the push, which she, in this instance, required; and, accordingly, timing her visit so as to avoid Jem's hours at home, she went the following afternoon to Ancoats.

The outside of the well-known house struck her as different; for the door was closed, instead of open, as it once had always stood. The window-plants, George Wilson's pride and especial care, looked withering and drooping. They had been without water for a long time, and now, when the widow had reproached herself severely for neglect, in her ignorant anxiety, she gave them too much. On opening the door, Alice was seen, not stirring about in her habitual way, but knitting by the fire-side. The room felt hot, although the fire burnt grey and dim,

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under the bright rays of the afternoon sun. Mrs. Wilson was "siding"[1] the dinner things, and talking all the time, in a kind of whining, shouting voice, which Mary did not at first understand. She understood, at once, however, that her absence had been noted, and talked over; she saw a constrained look on Mrs. Wilson's sorrow-stricken face, which told her a scolding was to come.

"Dear! Mary, is that you?" she began. "Why, who would ha' dreamt of seeing you! We thought you'd clean forgotten us; and Jem has often wondered if he should know you, if he met you in the street."

Now, poor Jane Wilson had been sorely tried; and at present her trials had had no outward effect, but that of increased acerbity of temper. She wished to show Mary how much she was offended, and meant to strengthen her cause, by putting some of her own sharp speeches into Jem's mouth.

Mary felt guilty, and had no good reason to give as an apology; so for a minute she stood silent, looking very much ashamed, and then turned to speak to Aunt Alice, who, in her surprised, hearty greeting to Mary, had dropped her ball of worsted, and was busy trying to set the thread to rights, before the kitten had entangled it past redemption, once round every chair, and twice round the table.

"You mun speak louder than that, if you mean her to hear; she's become as deaf as a post this last few weeks. I'd ha' told you, if I'd remembered how long it were sin' you'd seen her."

"Yes, my dear, I'm getting very hard o' hearing of late," said Alice, catching the state of the case, with her quick glancing eyes. "I suppose it's the beginning of th' end."

"Don't talk o' that way," screamed her sister-in-law. "We've had enow of ends and deaths without forecasting more." She covered her face with her apron, and sat down to cry.

"He was such a good husband," said she, in a less excited tone, to Mary, as she looked up with tear-streaming eyes from behind her apron. "No one can tell what I've lost in him, for no one knew his worth like me."

Mary's listening sympathy softened her, and she went on to unburden her heavy laden heart.

"Eh, dear, dear! No one knows what I've lost. When my poor boys went, I thought th' Almighty had crushed me to th' ground, but I never thought o' losing George; I did na think

[1] To "side," to put aside, or in order.

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I could ha' borne to ha' lived without him. And yet I'm here, and he's—" A fresh burst of crying interrupted her speech.

"Mary," beginning to speak again,—"did you ever hear what a poor creature I were when he married me? And he such a handsome fellow! Jem's nothing to what his father were at his age."

Yes! Mary had heard, and so she said. But the poor woman's thoughts had gone back to those days, and her little recollections came out, with many interruptions of sighs, and tears, and shakes of the head.

"There were nought about me for him to choose me. I were just well enough afore that accident, but at after I were downright plain. And there was Bessy Witter as would ha' given her eyes for him; she as is Mrs. Carson now, for she were a handsome lass, although I never could see her beauty then; and Carson warn't so much above her, as they're both above us all now."

Mary went very red, and wished she could help doing so, and wished also that Mrs. Wilson would tell her more about the father and mother of her lover; but she durst not ask, and Mrs. Wilson's thoughts soon returned to her husband, and their early married days.

"If you'll believe me, Mary, there never was such a born goose at housekeeping as I were; and yet he married me! I had been in a factory sin' five years old a'most, and I knew nought about cleaning or cooking, let alone washing and such-like work. The day after we were married he went to his work at after breakfast, and says he, 'Jenny, we'll ha' th' cold beef and potatoes, and that's a dinner for a prince.' I were anxious to make him comfortable, God knows how anxious. And yet I'd no notion how to cook a potato. I know'd they were boiled, and I know'd their skins were taken off, and that were all. So I tidyed my house in a rough kind o' way, then I looked at that very clock up yonder," pointing at one that hung against the wall, "and I seed it were nine o'clock, so, thinks I, th' potatoes shall be well boiled at any rate, and I gets 'em on th' fire in a jiffy (that's to say, as soon as I could peel 'em, which were a tough job at first), and then I fell to unpacking my boxes! and at twenty minutes past twelve he comes home, and I had the beef ready on th' table, and I went to take the potatoes out o' th' pot; but oh! Mary th' water had boiled away, and they were all a nasty brown mass, as smelt through all the house. He said nought, and were very gentle; but, oh, Mary, I cried so that

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afternoon. I shall ne'er forget it; no, never. I made many a blunder at after, but none that fretted me like that."

"Father does not like girls to work in factories," said Mary.

"No, I know he doesn't; and reason good. They oughtn't to go at after they're married, that I'm very clear about. I could reckon up" (counting with her fingers), "ay, nine men I know, as has been driven to th' public-house by having wives as worked in factories; good folk, too, as though there was no harm in putting their little ones out at nurse, and letting their house go all dirty, and their fires all out; and that was a place as was tempting for a husband to stay in, was it? He soon finds out gin-shops, where all is clean and bright, and where th' fire blazes cheerily, and gives a man a welcome as it were."

Alice, who was standing near for the convenience of hearing, had caught much of this speech, and it was evident the subject had previously been discussed by the women, for she chimed in.

"I wish our Jem could speak a word to th' queen about factory work for married women. Eh! but he comes it strong, when once yo get him to speak about it. Wife o' his'n will never work away fra' home."

"I say it's Prince Albert as ought to be asked how he'd like his missis to be from home when he comes in, tired and worn, and wanting some one to cheer him; and may be, her to come in by and by, just as tired and down in th' mouth; and he'd like for her never to be at home to see to th' cleaning of his house, or to keep a bright fire in his grate. Let alone his meals being all hugger-mugger and comfortless. I'd be bound, prince as he is, if his missis served him so, he'd be off to a gin-palace or summat o' that kind. So why can't he make a law again poor folks' wives working in factories?"

Mary ventured to say that she thought the queen and Prince Albert could not make laws, but the answer was,

"Pooh! don't tell me it's not the queen as makes laws; and isn't she bound to obey Prince Albert? And if he said they mustn't, why she'd say they mustn't, and then all folk would say, oh no, we never shall do any such thing no more."

"Jem's getten on rarely," said Alice, who had not heard her sister's last bursts of eloquence, and whose thoughts were still running on her nephew, and his various talents. "He's found out summat about a crank or a tank, I forget rightly which it is, but th' master's made him foreman, and he all the while turning off hands; but he said he could na' part wi' Jem, nohow.



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He's good wage now: I tell him he'll be thinking of marrying soon, and he deserves a right down good wife, that he does."

Mary went very red, and looked annoyed, although there was a secret spring of joy deep down in her heart, at hearing Jem so spoken of. But his mother only saw the annoyed look, an' was piqued accordingly. She was not over and above desirous that her son should marry. His presence in the house seemed a relic of happier times, and she had some little jealousy of his future wife, whoever she might be. Still she could not bear any one not to feel gratified and flattered by Jem's preference, and full well she knew how above all others he preferred Mary. Now she had never thought Mary good enough for Jem, and her late neglect in coming to see her still rankled a little in her breast. So she determined to invent a little, in order to do away with any idea Mary might have that Jem would choose her for "his right down good wife," as Aunt Alice called it.

"Ay, he'll be for taking a wife soon," and then, in a lower voice, as if confidentially, but really to prevent any contradiction or explanation from her simple sister-in-law, she added,

"It'll not be long afore Molly Gibson (that's her at th' provision-shop round the corner) will hear a secret as will not displease her, I'm thinking. She's been casting sheep's eyes at our Jem this many a day, but he thought her father would not give her to a common working man; but now he's good as her, every bit. I thought once he'd a fancy for thee, Mary, but I donnot think yo'd ever ha' suited, so it's best as it is."

By an effort Mary managed to keep down her vexation, and to say, "She hoped he'd be happy with Molly Gibson. She was very handsome, for certain."

"Ay, and a notable body, too. I'll just step upstairs and show you the patchwork quilt she gave me but last Saturday."

Mary was glad she was going out of the room. Her words irritated her; perhaps not the less because she did not fully believe them. Besides, she wanted to speak to Alice, and Mrs. Wilson seemed to think that she, as the widow, ought to absorb all the attention.

"Dear Alice," began Mary, "I'm so grieved to find you so deaf; it must have come on very rapid."

"Yes, dear, it's a trial; I'll not deny it. Pray God give me strength to find out its teaching. I felt it sore one fine day when I thought I'd go gather some meadow-sweet to make tea for Jane's cough; and the fields seemed so dree and still, and at first I could na' make out what was wanting; and then it struck

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me it were th' song o' the birds, and that I never should hear their sweet music no more, and I could na' help crying a bit. But I've much to be thankful for. I think I'm a comfort to Jane, if I'm only some one to scold now and then; poor body! It takes off her thoughts from her sore losses when she can scold a bit. If my eyes are left I can do well enough; I can guess at what folk are saying."

The splendid red and yellow patch-quilt now made its appearance, and Jane Wilson would not be satisfied unless Mary praised it all over, border, centre, and ground-work, right side and wrong; and Mary did her duty, saying all the more, because she could not work herself up to any very hearty admiration of her rival's present. She made haste, however, with her commendations, in order to avoid encountering Jem. As soon as she was fairly away from the house and street, she slackened her pace, and began to think. Did Jem really care for Molly Gibson? Well, if he did, let him. People seemed all to think he was much too good for her (Mary's own self). Perhaps some one else, far more handsome, and far more grand, would show him one day that she was good enough to be Mrs. Henry Carson. So temper, or what Mary called "spirit," led her to encourage Mr. Carson more than ever she had done before.

Some weeks after this, there was a meeting of the Trades' Union to which John Barton belonged. The morning of the day on which it was to take place he had lain late in bed, for what was the use of getting up? He had hesitated between the purchase of meal or opium, and had chosen the latter, for its use had become a necessity with him. He wanted it to relieve him from the terrible depression its absence occasioned. A large lump seemed only to bring him into a natural state, or what had been his natural state formerly. Eight o'clock was the hour fixed for the meeting; and at it were read letters, filled with details of woe from all parts of the country. Fierce, heavy gloom brooded over the assembly; and fiercely and heavily did the men separate, towards eleven o'clock, some irritated by the opposition of others to their desperate plans.

It was not a night to cheer them, as they quitted the glare of the gas-lighted room, and came out into the street. Unceasing, soaking rain was falling; the very lamps seemed obscured by the damp upon the glass, and their light reached but to a little distance from the posts. The streets were cleared of passers-by; not a creature seemed stirring, except here and there a drenched policeman in his oil-skin cape. Barton wished the others good-

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night, and set off home. He had gone through a street or two, when he heard a step behind him; but he did not care to look and see who it was. A little further, and the person quickened step, and touched his arm very lightly. He turned, and saw, even by the darkness visible of that badly-lighted street, that the woman who stood by him was of no doubtful profession. It was told by her faded finery, all unfit to meet the pelting of that pitiless storm; the gauze bonnet, once pink, now dirty white, the muslin gown, all draggled, and soaking wet up to the very knees; the gay-coloured barège shawl, closely wrapped round the form, which yet shivered and shook, as the woman whispered: "I want to speak to you."

He swore an oath, and bade her begone.

"I really do. Don't send me away. I'm so out of breath, I cannot say what I would all at once." She put her hand to her side, and caught her breath with evident pain.

"I tell thee I'm not the man for thee," adding an opprobrious name. "Stay," said he, as a thought suggested by her voice flashed across him. He griped her arm—the arm he had just before shaken off, and dragged her, faintly resisting, to the nearest lamp-post. He pushed her bonnet back, and roughly held the face she would fain have averted, to the light, and in her large, unnaturally bright grey eyes, her lovely mouth, half open, as if imploring the forbearance she could not ask for in words, he saw at once the long-lost Esther; she who had caused his wife's death. Much was like the gay creature of former years; but the glaring paint, the sharp features, the changed expression of the whole! But most of all, he loathed the dress; and yet the poor thing, out of her little choice of attire, had put on the plainest she had, to come on that night's errand.

"So it's thee, is it! It's thee!" exclaimed John, as he ground his teeth, and shook her with passion. "I've looked for thee long at corners o' streets, and such like places. I knew I should find thee at last. Thee'll may be bethink thee o' some words I spoke, which put thee up at th' time; summut about street-walkers; but oh no! thou art none o' them naughts; no one thinks thou art, who sees thy fine draggle-tailed dress, and thy pretty pink cheeks!" stopping for very want of breath.

"Oh, mercy! John, mercy! listen to me for Mary's sake!"

She meant his daughter, but the name only fell on his ear as belonging to his wife; and it was adding fuel to the fire. In vain did her face grow deadly pale around the vivid circle of paint, in vain did she gasp for mercy,—he burst forth again.

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"And thou names that name to me! and thou thinks the thought of her will bring thee mercy! Dost thou know it was thee who killed her, as sure as ever Cain killed Abel. She'd loved thee as her own, and she trusted thee as her own, and when thou wert gone she never held head up again, but died in less than a three week; and at the judgment day she'll rise, and point to thee as her murderer; or if she don't, I will."

He flung her, trembling, sinking, fainting, from him, and strode away. She fell with a feeble scream against the lamp-post, and lay there in her weakness, unable to rise. A policeman came up in time to see the close of these occurrences, and concluding from Esther's unsteady, reeling fall, that she was tipsy, he took her in her half-unconscious state to the lock-ups for the night. The superintendent of that abode of vice and misery was roused from his dozing watch through the dark hours, by half-delirious wails and moanings, which he reported as arising from intoxication. If he had listened he would have heard these words, repeated in various forms, but always in the same anxious, muttering way.

"He would not listen to me; what can I do? He would not listen to me, and I wanted to warn him! Oh, what shall I do to save Mary's child? What shall I do? How can I keep her from being such a one as I am; such a wretched, loathsome creature! She was listening just as I listened, and loving just as I loved, and the end will be just like my end. How shall I save her? She won't hearken to warning, or heed it more than I did; and who loves her well enough to watch over her as she should be watched? God keep her from harm! And yet I won't pray for her; sinner that I am! Can my prayers be heard? No! they'll only do harm. How shall I save her? He would not listen to me."

So the night wore away. The next morning she was taken up to the New Bailey. It was a clear case of disorderly vagrancy, and she was committed to prison for a month. How much might happen in that time!

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## CHAPTER XI

" Oh Mary, canst thou wreck his peace,
Wha for thy sake wad gladly die?
Or canst thou break that heart of his,
Whase only faut is loving thee? "

BURNS.

" I can like of the wealth, I must confess,
Yet more I prize the man though moneyless;
I am not of their humour yet that can
For title or estate affect a man;
Or of myself one body deign to make
With him I loath, for his possessions' sake."

WITHER'S " FIDELIA."

BARTON returned home after his encounter with Esther, uneasy and dissatisfied. He had said no more than he had been planning to say for years, in case she was ever thrown in his way, in the character in which he felt certain he should meet her. He believed she deserved it all, and yet he now wished he had not said it. Her look, as she asked for mercy, haunted him through his broken and disordered sleep; her form, as he last saw her, lying prostrate in helplessness, would not be banished from his dreams. He sat up in bed to try and dispel the vision. Now too late his conscience smote him with harshness. It would have been all very well, he thought, to have said what he did, if he had added some kind words, at last. He wondered if his dead wife was conscious of that night's occurrence; and he hoped not, for with her love for Esther he believed it would embitter Heaven to have seen her so degraded and repulsed. For he now recalled her humility, her tacit acknowledgment of her lost character; and he began to marvel if there was power in the religion he had often heard of to turn her from her ways. He felt that no earthly power that he knew of could do it, but there glimmered on his darkness, the idea that religion might save her. Still where to find her again? In the wilderness of a large town, where to meet with an individual of so little value or note to any?

And evening after evening he paced those streets in which he had heard her footsteps following him, peering under every fantastic, discreditable bonnet, in the hopes of once more meeting Esther, and addressing her in a far different manner from what he had done before. But he returned, night after night, disappointed in his search, and at last gave it up in despair, and

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tried to recall his angry feelings towards her, in order to find relief from his present self-reproach.

He often looked at Mary, and wished she were not so like her aunt, for the very bodily likeness seemed to suggest a possibility of a similar likeness in their fate; and then this idea enraged his irritable mind, and he became suspicious and anxious about Mary's conduct. Now hitherto she had been so remarkably free from all control, and almost from all inquiry concerning her actions, that she did not brook this change in her father's behaviour very well. Just when she was yielding more than ever to Mr. Carson's desire of frequent meetings, it was hard to be so questioned concerning her hours of leaving off work, whether she had come straight home, etc. She could not tell lies; though she could conceal much if she were not questioned. So she took refuge in obstinate silence, alleging as a reason for it her indignation at being so cross-examined. This did not add to the good feeling between father and daughter, and yet they dearly loved each other; and in the minds of each, one principal reason for maintaining such behaviour as displeased the other, was the believing that this conduct would insure that person's happiness.

Her father now began to wish Mary were married. Then this terrible superstitious fear suggested by her likeness to Esther would be done away with. He felt that he could not resume the reins he had once slackened. But with a husband it would be different. If Jem Wilson would but marry her! With his character for steadiness and talent! But he was afraid Mary had slighted him, he came so seldom now to the house. He would ask her.

"Mary, what's come o'er thee and Jem Wilson? Yo were great friends at one time."

"Oh, folk say he's going to be married to Molly Gibson, and of course courting takes up a deal o' time," answered Mary, as indifferently as she could.

"Thou'st played thy cards badly, then," replied her father, in a surly tone. "At one time he were desperate fond o' thee, or I'm much mistaken. Much fonder of thee than thou deservedst."

"That's as people think," said Mary, pertly, for she remembered that the very morning before she had met Mr. Carson, who had sighed, and swore, and protested all manner of tender vows that she was the loveliest, sweetest, best, etc. And when she had seen him afterwards riding with one of his beautiful

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sisters, had he not evidently pointed her out as in some way or other an object worthy of attention and interest, and then lingered behind his sister's horse for a moment to kiss his hand repeatedly. So, as for Jem Wilson, she could whistle him down the wind.

But her father was not in the mood to put up with pertness, and he upbraided her with the loss of Jem Wilson till she had to bite her lips till the blood came, in order to keep down the angry words that would rise in her heart. At last her father left the house, and then she might give way to her passionate tears.

It so happened that Jem, after much anxious thought, had determined that day to "put his fortune to the touch, to win or lose it all." He was in a condition to maintain a wife in comfort. It was true his mother and aunt must form part of the household; but such is not an uncommon case among the poor, and if there were the advantage of previous friendship between the parties, it was not, he thought, an obstacle to matrimony. Both mother and aunt he believed would welcome Mary. And oh! what a certainty of happiness the idea of that welcome implied.

He had been absent and abstracted all day long with the thought of the coming event of the evening. He almost smiled at himself for his care in washing and dressing in preparation for his visit to Mary; as if one waistcoat or another could decide his fate in so passionately momentous a thing. He believed he only delayed before his little looking-glass for cowardice, for absolute fear of a girl. He would try not to think so much about the affair, and he thought the more.

Poor Jem! it is not an auspicious moment for thee!

"Come in," said Mary, as some one knocked at the door, while she sat sadly at her sewing, trying to earn a few pence by working over hours at some mourning.

Jem entered, looking more awkward and abashed than he had ever done before. Yet here was Mary all alone, just as he had hoped to find her. She did not ask him to take a chair, but after standing a minute or two he sat down near her.

"Is your father at home, Mary?" said he, by way of making an opening, for she seemed determined to keep silence, and went on stitching away.

"No, he's gone to his union, I suppose." Another silence. It was no use waiting, thought Jem. The subject would never be led to by any talk he could think of in his anxious fluttered state. He had better begin at once.

"Mary!" said he, and the unusual tone of his voice made her

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look up for an instant, but in that time she understood from his countenance what was coming, and her heart beat so suddenly and violently she could hardly sit still. Yet one thing she was sure of; nothing he could say should make her have him. She would show them all *who* would be glad to have her. She was not yet calm after her father's irritating speeches. Yet her eyes fell veiled before that passionate look fixed upon her.

"Dear Mary! (for how dear you are, I cannot rightly tell you in words). It's no new story I'm going to speak about. You must ha' seen and known it long; for since we were boy and girl, I ha' loved you above father and mother and all; and all I've thought on by day and dreamt on by night, has been something in which you've had a share. I'd no way of keeping you for long, and I scorned to try and tie you down; and I lived in terror lest some one else should take you to himself. But now, Mary, I'm foreman in th' works, and, dear Mary! listen," as she, in her unbearable agitation, stood up and turned away from him. He rose too, and came nearer, trying to take hold of her hand; but this she would not allow. She was bracing herself up to refuse him, for once and for all.

"And now, Mary, I've a home to offer you, and a heart as true as ever man had to love you and cherish you; we shall never be rich folk, I daresay; but if a loving heart, and a strong right arm can shield you from sorrow, or from want, mine shall do it. I cannot speak as I would like; my love won't let itself be put in words. But oh! darling, say you believe me, and that you'll be mine."

She could not speak at once; her words would not come.

"Mary, they say silence gives consent; is it so?" he whispered.

Now or never the effort must be made.

"No! it does not with me." Her voice was calm, although she trembled from head to foot. "I will always be your friend, Jem, but I can never be your wife."

"Not my wife," said he, mournfully. "Oh, Mary, think awhile! you cannot be my friend if you will not be my wife. At least I can never be content to be only your friend. Do think awhile! If you say No you will make me hopeless, desperate. It's no love of yesterday. It has made the very groundwork of all that people call good in me. I don't know what I shall be if you won't have me. And Mary! think how glad your father would be! it may sound vain, but he's told me more than once how much he should like to see us two married!"

Jem intended this for a powerful argument, but in Mary's

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present mood it told against him more than anything; for it suggested the false and foolish idea, that her father, in his evident anxiety to promote her marriage with Jem, had been speaking to him on the subject with some degree of solicitation.

"I tell you, Jem, it cannot be. Once for all, I will never marry you."

"And is this the end of all my hopes and fears? the end of my life, I may say, for it is the end of all worth living for!" His agitation rose and carried him into passion. "Mary! you'll hear, may be, of me as a drunkard, and may be as a thief, and may be as a murderer. Remember! when all are speaking ill of me, you will have no right to blame me, for it's your cruelty that will have made me what I feel I shall become. You won't even say you'll try and like me; will you, Mary!." said he, suddenly changing his tone from threatening despair to fond passionate entreaty, as he took her hand and held it forcibly between both of his, while he tried to catch a glimpse of her averted face. She was silent, but it was from deep and violent emotion. He could not bear to wait; he would not hope, to be dashed away again; he rather in his bitterness of heart chose the certainty of despair, and before she could resolve what to answer, he flung away her hand and rushed out of the house.

"Jem! Jem!" cried she, with faint and choking voice. It was too late; he left street after street behind him with his almost winged speed, as he sought the fields, where he might give way unobserved to all the deep despair he felt.

It was scarcely ten minutes since he had entered the house, and found Mary at comparative peace, and now she lay half across the dresser, her head hidden in her hands, and every part of her body shaking with the violence of her sobs. She could not have told at first (if you had asked her, and she could have commanded voice enough to answer) why she was in such agonised grief. It was too sudden for her to analyse, or think upon it. She only felt, that by her own doing her life would be hereafter blank and dreary. By and by her sorrow exhausted her body by its power, and she seemed to have no strength left for crying. She sat down; and now thoughts crowded on her mind. One little hour ago, and all was still unsaid, and she had her fate in her own power. And yet, how long ago had she determined to say pretty much what she did, if the occasion ever offered.

It was as if two people were arguing the matter; that mournful, desponding communion between her former self, and her

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present self. Herself, a day, an hour ago; and herself now. For we have every one of us felt how a very few minutes of the months and years called life will sometimes suffice to place all time past and future in an entirely new light; will make us see the vanity or the criminality of the bygone, and so change the aspect of the coming time that we look with loathing on the very thing we have most desired. A few moments may change our character for life, by giving a totally different direction to our aims and energies.

To return to Mary. Her plan had been, as we well know, to marry Mr. Carson, and the occurrence an hour ago was only a preliminary step. True; but it had unveiled her heart to her; it had convinced her that she loved Jem above all persons or things. But Jem was a poor mechanic, with a mother and aunt to keep; a mother, too, who had shown her pretty clearly that she did not desire her for a daughter-in-law: while Mr. Carson was rich, and prosperous, and gay, and (she believed) would place her in all circumstances of ease and luxury, where want could never come. What were these hollow vanities to her, now she had discovered the passionate secret of her soul? She felt as if she almost hated Mr. Carson, who had decoyed her with his baubles. She now saw how vain, how nothing to her, would be all gaieties and pomps, all joys and pleasures, unless she might share them with Jem; yes, with him she had harshly rejected so short a time ago. If he were poor, she loved him all the better. If his mother did think her unworthy of him, what was it but the truth, as she now owned with bitter penitence. She had hitherto been walking in grope-light towards a precipice; but in the clear revelation of that past hour she saw her danger, and turned away, resolutely, and for ever.

That was some comfort: I mean her clear perception of what she ought not to do; of what no luring temptations should ever again induce her to hearken to. How she could best undo the wrong she had done to Jem and herself by refusing his love, was another anxious question. She wearied herself with proposing plans, and rejecting them.

She was roused to a consciousness of time by hearing the neighbouring church clock strike twelve. Her father she knew might be expected home any minute, and she was in no mood for a meeting with him. So she hastily gathered up her work, and went to her own little bedroom, leaving him to let himself in.

She put out her candle, that her father might not see its light

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under the door; and sat down on her bed to think. But after turning things over in her mind again and again, she could only determine at once to put an end to all further communication with Mr. Carson, in the most decided way she could. Maidenly modesty (and true love is ever modest) seemed to oppose every plan she could think of for showing Jem how much she repented her decision against him, and how dearly she had now discovered that she loved him. She came to the unusual wisdom of resolving to do nothing, but strive to be patient, and improve circumstances as they might turn up. Surely, if Jem knew of her remaining unmarried, he would try his fortune again. He would never be content with one rejection; she believed she could not in his place. She had been very wrong, but now she would endeavour to do right, and have womanly patience, until he saw her changed and repentant mind in her natural actions. Even if she had to wait for years, it was no more than now it was easy to look forward to, as a penance for her giddy flirting on the one hand, and her cruel mistake concerning her feelings on the other. So anticipating a happy ending to the course of her love, however distant it might be, she fell asleep just as the earliest factory bells were ringing. She had sunk down in her clothes, and her sleep was unrefreshing. She wakened up shivery and chill in body, and sorrow-stricken in mind, though she could not at first rightly tell the cause of her depression.

She recalled the events of the night before, and still resolved to adhere to those determinations she had then formed. But patience seemed a far more difficult virtue this morning.

She hastened downstairs, and in her earnest sad desire to do right, now took much pains to secure a comfortable though scanty breakfast for her father; and when he dawdled into the room, in an evidently irritable temper, she bore all with the gentleness of penitence, till at last her mild answers turned away wrath.

She loathed the idea of meeting Sally Leadbitter at her daily work; yet it must be done, and she tried to nerve herself for the encounter, and to make it at once understood, that having determined to give up having anything further to do with Mr. Carson, she considered the bond of intimacy broken between them.

But Sally was not the person to let these resolutions be carried into effect too easily. She soon became aware of the present state of Mary's feelings, but she thought they merely arose

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from the changeableness of girlhood, and that the time would come when Mary would thank her for almost forcing her to keep up her meetings and communications with her rich lover.

So, when two days had passed over in rather too marked avoidance of Sally on Mary's part; and when the former was made aware, by Mr. Carson's complaints, that Mary was not keeping her appointments with him, and that unless he detained her by force, he had no chance of obtaining a word as she passed him in the street on her rapid walk home; she resolved to compel Mary to what she called her own good.

She took no notice during the third day of Mary's avoidance as they sat at work; she rather seemed to acquiesce in the coolness of their intercourse. She put away her sewing early, and went home to her mother, who, she said, was more ailing than usual. The other girls soon followed her example, and Mary, casting a rapid glance up and down the street, as she stood last on Miss Simmonds' doorstep, darted homewards, in hopes of avoiding the person whom she was fast learning to dread. That night she was safe from any encounter on her road, and she arrived at home, which she found as she expected, empty; for she knew it was a club night, which her father would not miss. She sat down to recover breath, and to still her heart, which panted more from nervousness than from over-exertion, although she had walked so quickly. Then she arose, and taking off her bonnet, her eye caught the form of Sally Leadbitter passing the window with a lingering step, and looking into the darkness with all her might, as if to ascertain if Mary were returned. In an instant she repassed and knocked at the house-door, but without awaiting an answer, she entered.

"Well, Mary, dear" (knowing well how little "dear" Mary considered her just then); "it's so difficult to get any comfortable talk at Miss Simmonds', I thought I'd just step up and see you at home."

"I understood from what you said your mother was ailing, and that you wanted to be with her," replied Mary, in no welcoming tone.

"Ay, but mother's better now," said the unabashed Sally. "Your father's out, I suppose?" looking round as well as she could; for Mary made no haste to perform the hospitable offices of striking a match, and lighting a candle.

"Yes, he's out," said Mary, shortly, and busying herself at last about the candle, without ever asking her visitor to sit down.

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"So much the better," answered Sally, "for to tell you the truth, Mary, I've a friend at th' end of the road, as is anxious to come and see you at home, since you're grown so particular as not to like to speak to him in the street. He'll be here directly."

"Oh, Sally, don't let him," said Mary, speaking at last heartily; and running to the door she would have fastened it, but Sally held her hands, laughing meanwhile at her distress.

"Oh, please, Sally," struggling, "dear Sally! don't let him come here, the neighbours will so talk, and father'll go mad if he hears; he'll kill me, Sally, he will. Besides, I don't love him —I never did. Oh, let me go," as footsteps approached; and then, as they passed the house, and seemed to give her a respite, she continued, "Do, Sally, dear Sally, go and tell him I don't love him, and that I don't want to have anything more to do with him. It was very wrong, I daresay, keeping company with him at all, but I'm very sorry, if I've led him to think too much of me; and I don't want him to think any more. Will you tell him this, Sally? and I'll do anything for you if you will."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Sally, in a more relenting mood, "I'll go back with you to where he's waiting for us; or rather, I should say, where I told him to wait for a quarter of an hour, till I seed if your father was at home; and if I didn't come back in that time, he said he'd come here, and break the door open but he'd see you."

"Oh, let us go, let us go," said Mary, feeling that the interview must be, and had better be anywhere than at home, where her father might return at any minute. She snatched up her bonnet, and was at the end of the court in an instant; but then, not knowing whether to turn to the right or to the left, she was obliged to wait for Sally, who came leisurely up, and put her arm through Mary's with a kind of decided hold, intended to prevent the possibility of her changing her mind, and turning back. But this, under the circumstances, was quite different to Mary's plan. She had wondered more than once if she must not have another interview with Mr. Carson; and had then determined, while she expressed her resolution that it should be the final one, to tell him how sorry she was if she had thoughtlessly given him false hopes. For be it remembered, she had the innocence, or the ignorance, to believe his intentions honourable; and he, feeling that at any price he must have her, only that he would obtain her as cheaply as he could, had never

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undeceived her; while Sally Leadbitter laughed in her sleeve at them both, and wondered how it would all end—whether Mary would gain her point of marriage, with her sly affectation of believing such to be Mr. Carson's intention in courting her.

Not very far from the end of the street, into which the court where Mary lived opened, they met Mr. Carson, his hat a good deal slouched over his face as if afraid of being recognised. He turned when he saw them coming, and led the way without uttering a word (although they were close behind) to a street of half-finished houses.

The length of the walk gave Mary time to recoil from the interview which was to follow; but even if her own resolve to go through with it had failed, there was the steady grasp of Sally Leadbitter, which she could not evade, without an absolute struggle.

At last he stopped in the shelter and concealment of a wooden fence, put up to keep the building rubbish from intruding on the foot-pavement. Inside this fence, a minute afterwards, the girls were standing by him; Mary now returning Sally's detaining grasp with interest, for she had determined on the way to make her a witness, willing, or unwilling, to the ensuing conversation. But Sally's curiosity led her to be a very passive prisoner in Mary's hold.

With more freedom than he had ever used before, Mr. Carson put his arm firmly round Mary's waist, in spite of her indignant resistance.

"Nay, nay! you little witch! Now I have caught you, I shall keep you prisoner. Tell me now what has made you run away from me so fast these few days—tell me, you sweet little coquette!"

Mary ceased struggling, but turned so as to be almost opposite to him, while she spoke out calmly and boldly.

"Mr. Carson! I want to speak to you for once and for all. Since I met you last Monday evening, I have made up my mind to have nothing more to do with you. I know I've been wrong in leading you to think I liked you; but I believe I didn't rightly know my own mind; and I humbly beg your pardon, sir, if I've led you to think too much of me."

For an instant he was surprised; the next, vanity came to his aid, and convinced him that she could only be joking. He, young, agreeable, rich, handsome! No! she was only showing a little womanly fondness for coquetting.

"You're a darling little rascal to go on in this way! 'Humbly

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begging my pardon if you've made me think too much of you.' As if you didn't know I think of you from morning till night. But you want to be told it again and again, do you?"

"No, indeed, sir, I don't. I would far liefer [1] that you should say you would never think of me again, than that you should speak of me in this way. For indeed, sir, I never was more in earnest than I am, when I say to-night is the last night I will ever speak to you."

"Last night, you sweet little equivocator, but not last day. Ha, Mary, I've caught you, have I?" as she, puzzled by his perseverance in thinking her joking, hesitated in what form she could now put her meaning.

"I mean, sir," she said, sharply, "that I will never speak to you again at any time, after to-night."

"And what's made this change, Mary?" said he, seriously enough now. "Have I done anything to offend you?" added he, earnestly.

"No, sir," she answered gently, but yet firmly. "I cannot tell you exactly why I've changed my mind; but I shall not alter it again; and as I said before, I beg your pardon if I've done wrong by you. And now, sir, if you please, good-night."

"But I do not please. You shall not go. What have I done, Mary? Tell me. You must not go without telling me how I have vexed you. What would you have me do?"

"Nothing, sir, but" (in an agitated tone), "oh! let me go! You cannot change my mind; it's quite made up. Oh, sir! why do you hold me so tight! If you *will* know why I won't have anything more to do with you, it is that I cannot love you. I have tried, and I really cannot."

This naive and candid avowal served her but little. He could not understand how it could be true. Some reason lurked behind. He was passionately in love. What should he do to tempt her? A thought struck him.

"Listen, Mary. Nay, I cannot let you go till you have heard me. I do love you dearly; and I won't believe but what you love me a very little, just a very little. Well, if you don't like to own it, never mind! I only want now to tell you how much I love you, by what I am ready to give up for you. You know (or perhaps you are not fully aware) how little my father and mother would like me to marry you. So angry would they be,

[1] "Liefer," rather.

"Yet had I *levre* unwist for sorrow die."

*Chaucer: Troilus and Creseide.*

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