Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell

Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life

"'How knowest thou,' may the distressed Novel-wright exclaim, 'that I, here where I sit, am the Foolishest of existing mortals; that this my Long-ear of a fictitious Biography shall not find one and the other, into whose still longer ears it may be the means, under Providence, of instilling somewhat?' We answer, 'None knows, none can certainly know: therefore, write on, worthy Brother, even as thou canst, even as it is given thee.'"
CARLYLE.

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 frame-work 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 seemingly 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 prosperous—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 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.

Chapter 1. A Mysterious Disappearance

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, &c., 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 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 gray-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 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 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're 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 nes[1]h 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 down stairs, 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 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 gray 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 every thing 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 any how. 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, 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 couldn't 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 i' 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 wasn't 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 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 th' 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're 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 'em 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 any thing 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 th' 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 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.

Chapter 2. A Manchester Tea-Party

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, any thing 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, &c. 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.

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 candlestick, 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 storeroom, 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 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 up stairs 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 sixpennyworth 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."

"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 any thing 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 occupation 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 hedge-row, 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, tea-pot, and a small tin saucepan, which served as a kettle, 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 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 houseplace 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 any thing 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, 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 any thing 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*."

Chapter 3. John Barton's Great Trouble

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 bed-side, 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 up stairs by the fire-light, and met the awe-struck look of the neighbour, which at once told him the 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 bed-side, her face buried in the clothes, which were almost crammed into her mouth, to keep down the choking sobs. The husband

stood like one stupified. The doctor questioned the neighbour in whispers, and then approaching Barton, said, "You must go down stairs. 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 up stairs 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 store-house 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, in his bewildered state, he could not tell.
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. 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 grief; 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 any thing."

"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 up stairs 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 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 them.

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 a 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 districts, which, however it may be lulled for a time, is sure to break 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, &c. 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 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. Every thing, 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 any thing for his order.

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's 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 a 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 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 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 the 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.

Chapter 4. Old Alice's History

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 bed-side, 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 he 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 the 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 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 her 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 grand-daughter 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 the 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 candle-boxes set on end (rather ricketty 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 workwoman 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 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, and 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 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."
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 th' week I'd ask'd 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 used 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.
"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;[3] I'd no time for crying by day, for that missis was terrible strict; she would not hearken to my going to th' funeral; and indeed I would have been too late, for George set off that very night by th' coach, and th' letter had been kept or summut (posts were not like th' posts now-a-days), and he found the burial all over, and father talking o' flitting; for he couldn't 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 th' 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! Gray 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