MARY BARTON BY MRS. GASKELL

EVERY MAN I 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

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

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

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,

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.

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.

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,

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).

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 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.

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

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

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 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.

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,