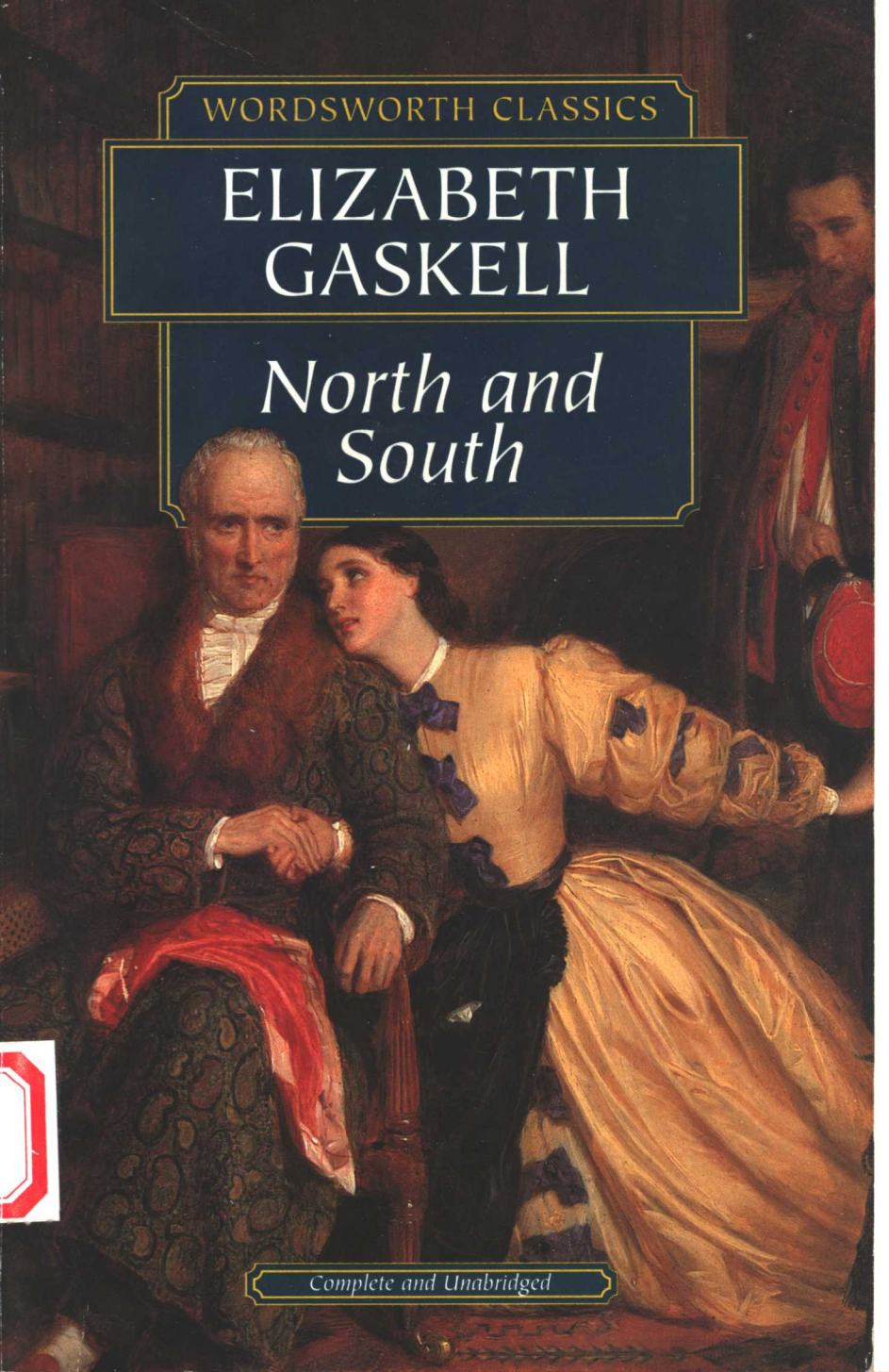
WORDSWORTH CLASSICS
ELIZABETH GASKELL
North and South
Complete and Unabridged

NORTH AND SOUTH

Elizabeth C. Gaskell

WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

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INTRODUCTION

The first instalment of *North and South* was published by Charles Dickens in the issue of *Household Words* dated 2 September 1854, shortly after Dickens's own novel on a similar industrial theme, *Hard Times*, had appeared in the same journal from 1 April to 12 August. The novel was completed in January 1855, but not without a great deal of *angst* on the author's part concerning the pressures of serialisation and the constraints of extent imposed on her, which she felt inhibited the full development of the story. This weakness was at least partially alleviated when the work appeared in volume form in 1855 'with various short passages inserted, and several new chapters added'. Written from Mrs Gaskell's first-hand experience subsequent to her father's resignation from the ministry due to religious doubts, the story follows the movement of the heroine, Margaret Hale, from the rural calm of southern England to the turbulent industrial north (Lancashire), where she becomes deeply embroiled in the bitter disputes between employers and employees. Margaret encounters the hard-faced and intolerant Mrs Thornton and her like-minded son John, and there follows a series of misunderstandings, adventures, deaths and misfortunes which eventually leads to a reconciliation between Margaret and John, the latter's recognition of the human value and legitimate rights of his employees, a greater understanding of the meaning of 'trade' as viewed from a professional, southern-middle-class standpoint, and a revelation of the depth of the divide between the industrial north and the predominently rural south of England in the mid-nineteenth century. On completion of the serialisation of *North and South*, Dickens congratulated Mrs Gaskell on 'the vigorous and powerful accomplishment of an anxious labour'. This tale of the hard-won triumphs of good over evil and of rational thought over prejudice, the emergence of respect in the face of hatred, and the eventual blossoming of love, will thrill the readers of today just as much as it did when it was first written almost one hundred and fifty years ago.

Elizabeth Gaskell was born Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson in Chelsea, London on 29 September 1810, the second surviving child of William Stevenson (a Unitarian minister and later a Treasury civil servant and journalist) and Elizabeth Holland. After her mother's death the following year, she was taken to live with her maternal aunt, Hannah Lamb, in Knutsford, Cheshire. From 1822–7 she attended school at the Misses Byerley's in Warwick and in Stratford-upon-Avon. She married the Revd William Gaskell, a Unitarian minister, in Manchester on 30 August 1832. She had five daughters, of whom four survived, and a son William who died in infancy of scarlet fever. She was greatly influenced and encouraged by Dickens, met Wordsworth at Ambleside, and was on close terms with Charlotte Brontë of whom she wrote the famous and controversial Life *(at Charlotte's father's request) which was published in 1857. She bought The Lawns, Holybourne, near Alton in Hampshire for her husband's retirement and died there suddenly from heart failure on 12 November 1865.*

FURTHER READING

J. A. V. Chapple & A. Pollard (eds), *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, 1966
J. A. V. Chapple & J. G. Sharps (eds), *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Portrait in Letters*, 1980
W. Gérin, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Biography*, 1976
A. B. Hopkins, *Elizabeth Gaskell: Her Life and Work*, 1952

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Preface to the First Edition

On its first appearance in *Household Words*, this tale was obliged to conform to the conditions imposed by the requirements of a weekly publication, and likewise to confine itself within certain advertised limits, in order that faith might be kept with the public. Although these conditions were made as light as they well could be, the author found it impossible to develop the story in the manner originally intended, and, more especially, was compelled to hurry on events with an improbable rapidity towards the close. In some degree to remedy this obvious defect, various short passages have been inserted, and several new chapters added. With this brief explanation, the tale is commended to the kindness of the reader,

Beseking hym lowly, of mercy and pité,
Of its rude makyng to have compassion.

CHAPTER I

'Haste to the Wedding'

Wooed and married and a'.

'EDITH!' said Margaret, gently, 'Edith!'

But, as Margaret half suspected, Edith had fallen asleep. She lay curled up on the sofa in the back drawing-room in Harley Street, looking very lovely in her white muslin and blue ribbons. If Titania had ever been dressed in white muslin and blue ribbons, and had fallen asleep on a crimson damask sofa in a back drawing-room, Edith might have been taken for her. Margaret was struck afresh by her cousin's beauty. They had grown up together from childhood, and all along Edith had been remarked upon by everyone, except Margaret, for her prettiness; but Margaret had never thought about it until the last few days, when the prospect of soon losing her companion seemed to give force to every sweet quality and charm which Edith possessed. They had been talking about wedding dresses, and wedding ceremonies; and Captain Lennox, and what he had told Edith about her future life at Corfu, where his regiment was stationed; and the difficulty of keeping a piano in good tune (a difficulty which Edith seemed to consider as one of the most formidable that could befall her in her married life), and what gowns she should want in the visits to Scotland, which would immediately succeed her marriage; but the whispered tone had latterly become more drowsy; and Margaret, after a pause of a few minutes found, as she fancied, that in spite of the buzz in the next room, Edith had rolled herself up into a soft ball of muslin and ribbon, and silken curls, and gone off into a peaceful little after-dinner nap.

Margaret had been on the point of telling her cousin of some of the plans and visions which she entertained as to her future life in the country parsonage, where her father and mother lived; and where her bright holidays had always been passed, though for the last ten years her aunt Shaw's house had been considered as her home. But in default

of a listener, she had to brood over the change in her life silently as heretofore. It was a happy brooding, although tinged with regret at being separated for an indefinite time from her gentle aunt and dear cousin. As she thought of the delight of filling the important post of only daughter in Helstone parsonage, pieces of the conversation out of the next room came upon her ears. Her aunt Shaw was talking to the five or six ladies who had been dining there, and whose husbands were still in the dining-room. They were the familiar acquaintances of the house; neighbours whom Mrs Shaw called friends, because she happened to dine with them more frequently than with any other people, and because if she or Edith wanted anything from them, or they from her, they did not scruple to make a call at each other's houses before luncheon. These ladies and their husbands were invited, in their capacity of friends, to eat a farewell dinner in honour of Edith's approaching marriage. Edith had rather objected to this arrangement, for Captain Lennox was expected to arrive by a late train this very evening; but, although she was a spoiled child, she was too careless and idle to have a very strong will of her own, and gave way when she found that her mother had absolutely ordered those extra delicacies of the season which are always supposed to be efficacious against immoderate grief at farewell dinners. She contented herself by leaning back in her chair, merely playing with the food on her plate, and looking grave and absent; while all around her were enjoying the mots of Mr Grey, the gentleman who always took the bottom of the table at Mrs Shaw's dinner parties, and asked Edith to give them some music in the drawing-room. Mr Grey was particularly agreeable over this farewell dinner, and the gentlemen stayed downstairs longer than usual. It was very well they did – to judge from the fragments of conversation which Margaret overheard.

'I suffered too much myself; not that I was not extremely happy with the poor dear General, but still disparity of age is a drawback; one that I was resolved Edith should not have to encounter. Of course, without any maternal partiality, I foresaw that the dear child was likely to marry early; indeed, I had often said that I was sure she would be married before she was nineteen. I had quite a prophetic feeling when Captain Lennox' – and here the voice dropped into a whisper, but Margaret could easily supply the blank. The course of true love in Edith's case had run remarkably smooth. Mrs Shaw had given way to the presentiment, as she expressed it, and had rather urged on the marriage, although it was below the expectations which many of Edith's acquaintances had formed for her, a young and pretty heiress. But Mrs

Shaw said that her only child should marry for love, – and sighed emphatically, as if love had not been her motive for marrying the General. Mrs Shaw enjoyed the romance of the present engagement rather more than her daughter. Not but that Edith was very thoroughly and properly in love; still she would certainly have preferred a good house in Belgravia, to all the picturesqueness of the life which Captain Lennox described at Corfu. The very parts which made Margaret glow as she listened, Edith pretended to shiver and shudder at; partly for the pleasure she had in being coaxed out of her dislike by her fond lover, and partly because anything of a gypsy or makeshift life was really distasteful to her. Yet had anyone come with a fine house, and a fine estate, and a fine title to boot, Edith would still have clung to Captain Lennox while the temptation lasted; when it was over, it is possible she might have had little qualms of ill-concealed regret that Captain Lennox could not have united in his person everything that was desirable. In this she was but her mother's child; who, after deliberately marrying General Shaw with no warmer feeling than respect for his character and establishment, was constantly though quietly, bemoaning her hard lot in being united to one whom she could not love.

'I have spared no expense in her trousseau,' were the next words Margaret heard. 'She has all the beautiful Indian shawls and scarfs the General gave to me, but which I shall never wear again.'

'She is a lucky girl,' replied another voice, which Margaret knew to be that of Mrs Gibson, a lady who was taking a double interest in the conversation, from the fact of one of her daughters having been married within the last few weeks. 'Helen had set her heart upon an Indian shawl, but really when I found what an extravagant price was asked, I was obliged to refuse her. She will be quite envious when she hears of Edith having Indian shawls. What kind are they? Delhi? with the lovely little borders?'

Margaret heard her aunt's voice again, but this time it was as if she had raised herself up from her half-recumbent position, and were looking into the more dimly lighted back drawing-room. 'Edith! Edith!' cried she; and then she sank as if wearied by the exertion. Margaret stepped forward.

'Edith is asleep, Aunt Shaw. Is it anything I can do?'

All the ladies said 'Poor child!' on receiving this distressing intelligence about Edith; and the minute lap-dog in Mrs Shaw's arms began to bark, as if excited by the burst of pity.

'Hush, Tiny! you naughty little girl! you will waken your mistress. It

was only to ask Edith if she would tell Newton to bring down her shawls: perhaps you would go, Margaret, dear?'

Margaret went up into the old nursery at the very top of the house, where Newton was busy getting up some laces which were required for the wedding. While Newton went (not without a muttered grumbling) to undo the shawls, which had already been exhibited four or five times that day, Margaret looked round upon the nursery; the first room in that house with which she had become familiar nine years ago, when she was brought, all untamed from the forest, to share the home, the play, and the lessons of her cousin Edith. She remembered the dark, dim look of the London nursery, presided over by an austere and ceremonious nurse, who was terribly particular about clean hands and torn frocks. She recollected the first tea up there – separate from her father and aunt, who were dining somewhere down below an infinite depth of stairs; for unless she were up in the sky (the child thought), they must be deep down in the bowels of the earth. At home – before she came to live in Harley Street – her mother's dressing-room had been her nursery; and as they kept early hours in the country parsonage, Margaret had always had her meals with her father and mother. Oh! well did the tall stately girl of eighteen remember the tears shed with such wild passion of grief by the little girl of nine, as she hid her face under the bedclothes, in that first night; and how she was bidden not to cry by the nurse, because it would disturb Miss Edith; and how she had cried as bitterly, but more quietly, till her newly-seen, grand pretty aunt had come softly upstairs with Mr Hale to show him his little sleeping daughter. Then the little Margaret had hushed her sobs, and tried to lie quiet as if asleep, for fear of making her father unhappy by her grief, which she dared not express before her aunt, and which she rather thought it was wrong to feel at all after the long hoping, and planning, and contriving they had gone through at home, before her wardrobe could be arranged so as to suit her grander circumstances, and before papa could leave his parish to come up to London, even for a few days.

Now she had got to love the old nursery, though it was but a dismantled place; and she looked all round, with a kind of cat-like regret, at the idea of leaving it for ever in three days.

'Ah Newton!' said she, 'I think we shall all be sorry to leave this dear old room.'

'Indeed, miss, I shan't for one. My eyes are not so good as they were, and the light here is so bad that I can't see to mend laces except just at the window, where there's always a shocking draught – enough to give one one's death of cold.'

'Well, I dare say you will have both good light and plenty of warmth at Naples. You must keep as much of your darning as you can till then. Thank you, Newton, I can take them down – you're busy.'

So Margaret went down laden with shawls, and snuffing up their spicy Eastern smell. Her aunt asked her to stand as a sort of lay figure on which to display them, as Edith was still asleep. No one thought about it; but Margaret's tall, finely-made figure, in the black silk dress which she was wearing as mourning for some distant relative of her father's, set off the long beautiful folds of the gorgeous shawls that would have half-smothered Edith. Margaret stood right under the chandelier, quite silent and passive, while her aunt adjusted the draperies. Occasionally, as she was turned round, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror over the chimney-piece, and smiled at her own appearance there – the familiar features in the usual garb of a princess. She touched the shawls gently as they hung around her, and took a pleasure in their soft feel and their brilliant colours, and rather liked to be dressed in such splendour – enjoying it much as a child would do, with a quiet pleased smile on her lips. Just then the door opened, and Mr Henry Lennox was suddenly announced. Some of the ladies started back, as if half-ashamed of their feminine interest in dress. Mrs Shaw held out her hand to the new-comer; Margaret stood perfectly still, thinking she might be yet wanted as a sort of block for the shawls; but looking at Mr Lennox with a bright, amused face, as if sure of his sympathy in her sense of the ludicrousness at being thus surprised.

Her aunt was so much absorbed in asking Mr Henry Lennox – who had not been able to come to dinner – all sorts of questions about his brother the bridegroom, his sister the bridesmaid (coming with the Captain from Scotland for the occasion), and various other members of the Lennox family, that Margaret saw she was no more wanted as shawl-bearer, and devoted herself to the amusement of the other visitors, whom her aunt had for the moment forgotten. Almost immediately Edith came in from the back drawing-room, winking and blinking her eyes at the stronger light, shaking back her slightly-ruffled curls, and altogether looking like the Sleeping Beauty just startled from her dreams. Even in her slumber she had instinctively felt that a Lennox was worth rousing herself for, and she had a multitude of questions to ask about dear Janet, the future, unseen sister-in-law, for whom she professed so much affection, that if Margaret had not been very proud she might have almost felt jealous of the mushroom rival. As Margaret sank rather more into the background on her aunt's joining the conversation, she saw Henry Lennox directing his look

towards a vacant seat near her; and she knew perfectly well that as soon as Edith released him from her questioning, he would take possession of that chair. She had not been quite sure, from her aunt's rather confused account of his engagements, whether he would come that night; it was almost a surprise to see him and now she was sure of a pleasant evening. He liked and disliked pretty nearly the same things that she did. Margaret's face was lightened up into an honest, open brightness. By and by he came. She received him with a smile which had not a tinge of shyness or self-consciousness in it.

'Well, I suppose you are all in the depths of business – ladies' business, I mean. Very different to my business, which is the real true law business. Playing with shawls is very different work to drawing up settlements.'

'Ah, I knew how you would be amused to find us all so occupied in admiring finery. But really Indian shawls are very perfect things of their kind.'

'I have no doubt they are. Their prices are very perfect, too. Nothing wanting.'

The gentlemen came dropping in one by one, and the buzz and noise deepened in tone.

'This is your last dinner-party, is it not? There are no more before Thursday?'

'No. I think after this evening we shall feel at rest which I am sure I have not done for many weeks; at least, that kind of rest when the hands have nothing more to do, and all the arrangements are complete for an event which must occupy one's head and heart. I shall be glad to have time to think, and I am sure Edith will.'

'I am not so sure about her; but I can fancy that you will. Whenever I have seen you lately, you have been carried away by a whirlwind of some other person's making.'

'Yes,' said Margaret, rather sadly, remembering the never-ending commotion about trifles that had been going on for more than a month past: 'I wonder if a marriage must always be preceded by what you call a whirlwind, or whether in some cases there might not rather be a calm and peaceful time just before it.'

'Cinderella's godmother ordering the trousseau, the wedding-breakfast, writing the notes of invitation, for instance,' said Mr Lennox, laughing.

'But are all these quite necessary troubles?' asked Margaret, looking up straight at him for an answer. A sense of indescribable weariness of all the arrangements for a pretty effect, in which Edith had been busied