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Edited by G. T. BETTANY, M.A., B.Sc.

MARY BARTON:

A TALE OF MANCHESTER LIFE.

BY

MRS. GASKELL.

“ ‘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.

With a Full Biographical Introduction by the Editor.

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“Nimm nur, Fährmann nimm die Miethe,
Die ich gerne dreifach biete!
Zween, die mit nur überfahren,
Waren geistige Naturen.”

BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

BY THE EDITOR.

EVERY period of great excitement and upheaval of society in modern times has its notable recorder, its photographic or imaginative reproducer, though sometimes long after date. Goethe, Manzoni, Victor Hugo, Walter Scott, and Dickens rank among the highest names in this form of fiction. It is to this class of book that "Mary Barton" belongs, although the author was not on the intellectual level of the men we have named. But in describing a state of society from intimate personal knowledge, she has displayed the cardinal virtue of truthfulness, and that most excellent quality in a novelist, appeal to the reader's best feelings.

Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson, afterwards Mrs. Gaskell, was the daughter, by his first marriage, of William Stevenson, a native of Berwick-on-Tweed. Mr. Stevenson had been in succession a teacher, a Unitarian minister, a farmer, a boarding-house keeper, and a writer on commercial subjects, and finally obtained the post of keeper of the records to the Treasury. At the time of his daughter's birth, September 29th, 1810, he was living in Lindsey Row, now forming part of Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. His wife was a Miss Holland, of Sandle Bridge, in Cheshire, who was descended from an old Lancashire family. An uncle, Peter Holland, the grandfather of the present Lord Knutsford, lived at Knutsford, in Cheshire, and in the same place the infant Elizabeth was destined to

be brought up. Within a month of her birth, her mother died, and after a week's delay, the infant was taken down to Knutsford, to be placed under the care of her mother's sister, Mrs. Lumb. There she grew up amid modest surroundings, and became the companion of her aunt's crippled daughter. The child must have been one of those quiet acute observers who photograph scenes and characters upon their memory. Knutsford was to become famous as "Cranford," and its quaint characters, and their mode of life, live before us as undoubted realities. In her kind aunt's unpretentious home, with its old-fashioned garden, the future novelist took in abundant material for her career. She was not, however, entirely disconnected with her father, for she paid several visits to Chelsea during her girlhood; but her father's second, and not happy, marriage rendered these visits sad rather than refreshing. About the age of fifteen, Elizabeth Stevenson was sent to school at Stratford-on-Avon, under a Miss Byerley; here she remained for two years, and gained some knowledge of Latin, French, and Italian. In 1827 she lost her only brother, John Stevenson, at sea; and his remarkable disappearance from the ship, of which he was first officer, afterwards suggested a passage in "Cranford." Her father died in April, 1829, and from that time till her marriage Miss Stevenson divided her time between Newcastle-on-Tyne (where she stayed with Mr. Turner, a well-known Unitarian minister), Edinburgh, London, and Knutsford. Everywhere her beauty was remarked and admired, and at Edinburgh numerous painters and sculptors desired to take her portrait. When she first met her future husband, we are not told. On August 30th, 1832, a month before the completion of her twenty-second year, she married, at Knutsford Church, the Rev. William Gaskell, Unitarian minister in Manchester.

William Gaskell was five years his wife's senior, having been born at Latchford, near Warrington, in

1805. He had studied at Glasgow University, graduating M.A. in 1824, and then entered Manchester College, York, as a divinity student. In 1828 he became junior minister of Cross Street Unitarian Chapel, Manchester, and remained junior till 1854; but his considerable abilities were early recognised. His marriage to Miss Stevenson was a very happy one, and Mr. Gaskell proved most helpful to his wife in her literary work.

Mrs. Gaskell now found herself in a home where she had ease of circumstances and of mind. She devoted herself to bringing up her children, and especially to the education of her daughters. She frequently took part in her husband's varied engagements, particularly in works of charity. In these years she was gradually gathering her rich store of information about Manchester life and character. She seems either to have had no original impulse to write, or else to have stifled or concealed it. The first literary effort of hers that is known to have been published, is contained in William Howitt's "Visits to Remarkable Places." Mrs. Howitt, in her autobiography, writes thus:—"My husband (William Howitt), on the announcement of his intended 'Visits to Remarkable Places,' received, in 1838, a letter from Manchester, signed E. C. Gaskell, drawing his attention to a fine old seat, Clopton Hall, near Stratford-on-Avon. It described in so powerful and graphic a manner the writer's visit as a schoolgirl to the mansion and its inmates, that in replying he urged his correspondent to use her pen for the public benefit."

The interest of this early contribution, and its evidence of the observation and power of imagination which the young girl already possessed when at school at Stratford-on-Avon, induce us to transcribe it. Mrs. Gaskell wrote thus:

"I wonder if you know Clopton Hall, about a mile from Stratford-on-Avon. Will you allow me to tell you of a very happy day I once spent there. I was at school in

the neighbourhood, and one of my schoolfellows was the daughter of a Mr. W. who then lived at Clopton. Mrs. W. asked a party of the girls to go and spend a long afternoon, and we set off one beautiful autumn day, full of delight and wonder respecting the place we were going to see. We passed through desolate, half-cultivated fields, till we came within sight of the house—a large, heavy, compact, square brick building, of that deep, dead red almost approaching to purple. In front was a large formal court, with the massy pillars surmounted with two grim monsters; but the walls of the court were broken down, and the grass grew as rank and wild within the enclosure as in the raised avenue walk down which we had come. The flowers were tangled with nettles, and it was only as we approached the house that we saw the single yellow rose and the Austrian briar trained into something like order round the deep-set diamond-paned windows. We trooped into the hall, with its tessellated marble floor, hung round with strange portraits of people who had been in their graves two hundred years at least; yet the colours were so fresh, and in some instances they were so life-like, that looking merely at the faces, I almost fancied the originals might be sitting in the parlour beyond. More completely to carry us back, as it were, to the days of the civil wars, there was a sort of military map hung up, well finished with pen and ink, showing the stations of the respective armies, and with old-fashioned writing beneath, the names of the principal towns, setting forth the strength of the garrison, etc. In this hall we were met by our kind hostess, and told we might ramble where we liked, in the house or out of the house, taking care to be in the ‘recessed parlour’ by tea-time. I preferred to wander up the wide shelving oak staircase, with its massy balustrade all crumbling and worm-eaten. The family then residing at the hall did not occupy one-half,—no, not one-third of the rooms; and the old-fashioned furniture was undisturbed in the greater part of them. In one of the bed-rooms (said to be haunted), and which, with its close pent-up atmosphere and the long shadows of evening creeping on, gave me an ‘eerie’ feeling, hung a portrait so singularly beautiful! a sweet-looking girl with pale gold hair combed back from her forehead, and falling in wavy ringlets on her neck, and with eyes that

‘looked like violets filled with dew,’ for there was the glittering of unshed tears before their deep dark blue—and that was the likeness of Charlotte Clopton, about whom there was so fearful a legend told at Stratford Church. In the time of some epidemic, the sweating-sickness, or the plague, this young girl had sickened, and to all appearance died. She was buried with fearful haste in the vaults of Clopton Chapel, attached to Stratford Church, but the sickness was not stayed. In a few days another of the Cloptons died, and him they bore to the ancestral vault; but as they descended the gloomy stairs, they saw by the torch-light, Charlotte Clopton in her grave-clothes leaning against the wall; and when they looked nearer, she was indeed dead, but not before, in the agonies of despair and hunger, she had bitten a piece from her white round shoulder! Of course, she had *walked* ever since. This was ‘Charlotte’s Chamber,’ and beyond Charlotte’s chamber was a state chamber carpeted with the dust of many years, and darkened by the creepers which had covered up the windows, and even forced themselves in luxuriant daring through the broken panes. Beyond, again, there was an old Catholic chapel, with a chaplain’s room, which had been walled up and forgotten till within the last few years. I went in on my hands and knees; for the entrance was very low. I recollect little in the chapel, but in the chaplain’s room were old, and I should think rare editions of many books, mostly folios. A large yellow-paper copy of Dryden’s ‘All for Love, or the World Well Lost,’ date 1686, caught my eye, and is the only one I particularly remember. Every here and there, as I wandered, I came upon a fresh branch of a staircase, and so numerous were the crooked half-lighted passages, that I wondered if I could find my way back again. There was a curious carved old chest in one of these passages, and with girlish curiosity I tried to open it; but the lid was too heavy, till I persuaded one of my companions to help me, and when it was opened, what do you think we saw—BONES!—but whether human, whether the remains of the lost bride, we did not stay to see, but ran off in partly feigned, and partly real terror.

“The last of these deserted rooms that I remember, the last, the most deserted, and the saddest, was the nursery,—a nursery without children, without singing voices,

without merry chiming footsteps! A nursery hung round with its once inhabitants, bold, gallant boys, and fair, arch-looking girls, and one or two nurses with round, fat babies in their arms. Who were they all? What was their lot in life? Sunshine, or storm? or had they been 'loved by the gods, and died young'? The very echoes knew not. Behind the house, in a hollow now wild, damp, and overgrown with elder-bushes, was a well called Margaret's Well, for there had a maiden of the house, of that name, drowned herself.

"I tried to obtain any information I could as to the family of Clopton of Clopton. They had been decaying ever since the Civil Wars; had for a generation or two been unable to live in the old house of their fathers, but had toiled in London, or abroad, for a livelihood; and the last of the old family, a bachelor, eccentric, miserly, old, and of most filthy habits, if report said true, had died at Clopton Hall but a few months before, a sort of boarder in Mrs. W.'s family. He was buried in the gorgeous chapel of the Cloptons in Stratford Church, where you see the banners waving, and the armour hung over one or two monuments. Mr. W. had been the old man's solicitor, and completely in his confidence, and to him he left the estate, encumbered and in bad condition. A year or two afterwards, the heir-at-law, a very distant relation living in Ireland, claimed and obtained the estate, on the plea of undue influence, if not of forgery, on Mr. W.'s part; and the last I heard of our kind entertainers on that day, was that they were outlawed, and living at Brussels."

The passage relating to the deserted nursery indicates a side of Mrs. Gaskell's character which was most intensely developed; and it was her grief at the loss of her only son, Willie, who died of scarlet fever in 1844, while the family were on a visit to Festiniog,—rather than the persuasions of Mr. Howitt—that stimulated the production of her first and most striking book. It has been stated that her medical man, finding the resources of his art were exhausted, pressed her to endeavour by the exercise of her literary powers, which he already believed to be considerable, to moderate and assuage the depression and grief

which had proved so difficult to remove. The first thing that suggested itself, owing to her deep admiration for country life, was a tale set about a century back, on the borders of Yorkshire; this was already in progress when Mrs. Gaskell bethought herself how deep was the romance in the lives of the people by whom she was daily surrounded. She had again and again come in contact with circumstances of harrowing interest and pathos in the lives of the cotton-workers of Manchester, and had probed, to a considerable extent, the wounds from which they were suffering, giving rise to an irritability, and in some instances a hatred, against the masters, which was not diminished by the luxurious lives of many of them. She found within the workers' lives a suffering which, in its injustice, its hopelessness, its helplessness, roused her deepest sympathy; and since no hearing was then to be gained by such workmen in national councils, or among the educated classes, she resolved to give expression to their "dumb agony," as she termed it, and put before the world the truth as she saw it.

Probably in 1846, the first volume of "Mary Barton" was completed, and was sent to Mr. Howitt in manuscript. Mr. and Mrs. Howitt were both delighted with it; and a few months later, says Mrs. Howitt, in her autobiography, Mrs. Gaskell came up to London to their house, with the book completed. But like most works of genius, it had to go through the usual mortifying rebuffs from publishers, and so long were the delays experienced, that Mrs. Gaskell afterwards declared she "forgot all about it." It was not till early in 1848, that Messrs. Chapman and Hall made an offer for the book, and purchased the copyright for £100; it was published on October 14th, 1848, without the author's name, and had an immediate and great success. "Fraser's Magazine" said of it: "Had we wit and wisdom enough, we should placard its sheets on every wall, and have them

read aloud from every pulpit, till a nation, calling itself Christian, began to act upon the awful facts contained in it." Thomas Carlyle sent the author a congratulatory letter; and Landor addressed an enthusiastic poem, "To the Author of *Mary Barton*," concluding,

"And thou hast taught me at the fount of Truth,
That none confer God's blessing but the poor,
None but the heavy-laden reach His throne."

"*Mary Barton*" has been translated into many languages, including French and German, and even Finnish, and has always had a wide popularity. But it did not pass altogether without censure. Some important manufacturers in and around Manchester complained of her injustice to their class, and of her rash treatment of some "burning questions of political economy." The charge had been carefully guarded against in her preface, where she had stated that she knew nothing of political economy, but only tried to write truthfully. If her narrative clashed or agreed with any system, it was unintentional on her part. So notable a writer as W. R. Greg, in an "Essay on *Mary Barton*," republished in his "Mistaken Aims and Attainable Ideals of the Artisan Class," while acknowledging its "surpassing literary merit," complained seriously of what he considered the mistaken representation of a general animosity between masters and men, and of the characters of the masters. He felt also that Mrs. Gaskell appeared to sanction the idea that the poor must look to the rich, and not to themselves, for relief and rescue from their miseries.

The leading writers of the day warmly welcomed Mrs. Gaskell. Dickens was especially enthusiastic, and when Mrs. Gaskell came up to town in May, 1849, she met at dinner, at his house in Devonshire Terrace, Carlyle and his wife, Thackeray, Samuel Rogers, Douglas Jerrold, and Hablot K. Browne. In January,

1850, Dickens asked her co-operation in his new venture, "Household Words," saying that there was no living English writer whose aid he would desire to enlist in preference to the authoress of "Mary Barton." He went on: "I should set a value on your help which your modesty can hardly imagine, and I am perfectly sure that the least result of your reflection or observation in respect of the life around you, would attract attention and do good. . . . My unaffected and great admiration of your book makes me very earnest in all relating to you."

Here we may, in passing, remark that Dickens's letters to Mrs. Gaskell show again and again how she suspected and disliked what seemed to her over-praise. He writes to her in December, 1851, "If you were not the most suspicious of women, always looking for soft sawder in the purest metal of praise, I should call your paper delightful, and touched in the tenderest and most delicate manner. Being what you are, I confine myself to the observation that I have called it 'A Love Affair at Cranford,' and sent it off to the printer's." Again, about Ruth, he says: "Forget that I called these two women my dear friends! Why, if I told you a fiftieth part of what I have thought about them, you would write me the most suspicious of notes, refusing to receive the fiftieth part of that." This indicates what we may call a modesty too modest, an unwillingness to believe in praise, that we imagine is confined mainly to high-souled women like Mrs. Gaskell, whose ideal of what they would like to do, or of what ought to be done, so far transcends their own felt achievement, that the barest justice seems to them extravagant praise, and is felt as poignantly as a censure.

The first number of "Household Words" (March 30, 1850) contained the beginning of a short story by Mrs. Gaskell, "Lizzie Leigh," and she continued to contribute to its columns frequently, many of her stories being afterwards republished in volumes, such

as "Lizzie Leigh," 1855; "My Lady Ludlow," 1859; "The Grey Woman," 1805. Her extremely interesting story, "The Moorland Cottage," appeared as a Christmas book in 1850, illustrated by Birket Foster.

Early in 1853, Mrs. Gaskell's second important novel, "Ruth," was published, Charlotte Brontë having with great good feeling postponed the publication of "Villette" in order not to interfere with Mrs. Gaskell's book, and generously thinking that it would be her own book that would suffer by comparison. "I dare say," writes Miss Brontë, "arrange as we may, we shall not be able wholly to prevent comparisons; it is the nature of some critics to be invidious; but we need not care: we can set them at defiance; they *shall* not make us foes, they *shall* not mingle with our mutual feelings one taint of jealousy; there is my hand on that; I know you will give clasp for clasp. 'Villette' has indeed no right to push itself before 'Ruth.' There is a goodness, a philanthropic purpose, a social use in the latter, to which the former cannot for an instant pretend."

The subjects of "Ruth," the impassable barrier drawn against those truly reformed after a fall, the evils resulting from a fall from truth on the part of a minister, the cruel hardness of the leading man of a dissenting community towards both minister and women, though depicted with extreme force and purity, were distasteful to many; and "Ruth" had not the success of "Mary Barton." But in many ways "Ruth" is fully worthy of the author of "Mary Barton." In June, 1853, the series of sketches and stories, entitled "Cranford," and depicting Knutsford, which had appeared in "Household Words" under titles partly chosen by Dickens, was published in one volume. In them the idyllic quietude of a town full of old ladies living in genteel poverty, the genuine, if small, disturbances which ruffle the surface of their propriety, the pathetic stories hidden in the hearts of the

least romantic-looking of the old maids, are revealed to us. Lord Houghton described the book as "the purest piece of humoristic description that has been added to British literature since Charles Lamb." Even Knutsford people were delighted to acknowledge the truthfulness of the description. An old Knutsford woman who read it without knowing anything about it, eagerly said to the lender, the author of "Knutsford and its Neighbourhood," "Why, sir! that 'Cranford' is all about Knutsford; my old mistress, Miss Harker, is mentioned in it; and our poor cow, she did go to the field in a large flannel waistcoat, because she had burned herself in a lime-pit."

Mrs. Gaskell's next important work, "North and South," after running through "Household Words," was published in 1855, with the insertion of several new passages and the addition of several chapters. It raised her fame still higher. It came as a kind of set-off against the unfavourable light in which manufacturers had been shown in "Mary Barton," for the hero is an employer who, after beginning as antagonist of the men, gradually becomes inspired with sympathy for them. The love story, however, constitutes the main interest of the book.

The next period of Mrs. Gaskell's life is that which includes her biography of Charlotte Brontë. It was in August, 1850, that the two novelists first met, at Sir James Kay Shuttleworth's, at Bowness, near Windermere. We discover from a letter of Mrs. Gaskell's at this time that the two agreed in liking Francis Newman's book on "The Soul," Ruskin's "Modern Painters" and "Seven Lamps." Her impression of Miss Brontë is given very clearly and vividly. The friendship grew, and became of a most intimate kind, untouched by the faintest shade of jealousy. In 1851, and again in 1853, Miss Brontë stayed with the Gaskells at Manchester. We learn from Miss Brontë's letter how charming her visits were, and how Mrs. Gaskell's children found their way completely

into her heart. Mrs. Gaskell's visit to Haworth in September, 1853, was the occasion of one of the most interesting bits of description in her "Life of Charlotte Brontë." This work, by which the fame of both writers was increased, was undertaken at the urgent request of Mr. Brontë in March, 1855. The labour of preparation and writing occupied the whole of 1856, the greatest pains being taken to ensure accuracy, even a visit to Brussels being undertaken to gain information at first hand. When the book was finished, early in 1857, Mrs. Gaskell, with two of her daughters, took a holiday in Rome, where she was the guest of Mr. W. W. Story.

The "Life of Charlotte Brontë," while acknowledged as a book of great power, and vividly and sympathetically representing a striking personality, was assailed by various persons who felt themselves aggrieved by statements made in it. The usual period of anxious correspondence and re-examination of evidence followed, and in one case a retractation had to be made. As Mrs. Gaskell could not, of course, prove many of the statements made by Miss Brontë to her, it had been unwise to refer so explicitly as she had done to some then living persons. But the book remains one of the classics of British biography.

For some time after the publication of "Charlotte Brontë," and the discussions to which it gave rise, Mrs. Gaskell wrote much less than usual, but all the time she was active in a large literary and social circle. She continued to extend her knowledge of workmen's clubs, being present at many of their discussions, and gaining the confidence of many poor girls among the working classes. Many friends from London and other parts of England, and admirers from America and the Continent visited her. In the autumn of 1855, she had begun an intimacy with Madame Mohl (*née* Mary Clarke), whose salon in Paris was so notable during the Second Empire. She often visited Paris for a considerable time, and

Madame Mohl related that she wrote the greater part of "Wives and Daughters" in her larger salon, standing up before the mantel-piece. During the cotton famine of 1862-3, Mrs. Gaskell was particularly active in Manchester in personal work among the poor. Her eldest daughter thus described her labours, in writing to Madame Mohl. "We had been to London to see the Exhibition of 1862, and the time had passed delightfully. On our return to Manchester, we were met by the terrible news of the scarcity of cotton, and of the famine which was gradually spreading over all Lancashire. I shall never forget the stupor with which we were struck. Nobody spoke of organising help; and nobody then could have imagined that it was possible to face the crisis, and triumph over it. I believe that *we* should have remained immovable in our chairs, looking fixedly at the coming misery; but you know how impossible inactivity was to mamma when there was help to be rendered. She immediately began to seek out what she could do. Strangely, the plan she conceived herself was precisely that which was afterwards generally adopted as the most efficacious for general aid. She thought we ought to assemble in a large ground-floor room as many working women as it would contain, and furnish them with material for needlework, for which we would pay them, not reckoning the absolute value of the work, but rather considering their necessary expenses for food and lodging. Before the time required to put this plan into action had elapsed, the need for a vast organisation was felt. A committee of ladies, of which my mother was a member, met to frame plans for occupying the factory women. Sewing-rooms were opened, and mamma gave up six or seven hours a day to organising and superintending this work. Her health quite broke down under the excessive fatigue. Here is a little trait which is very characteristic of her. There were, in one of the work-rooms which she visited most constantly, about five hundred Irish-

women of the lowest class, turbulent and ill-disposed. When the bell rang, impatient to escape from the confinement and the discipline, which they hated, they rushed towards the door in a furious crowd; serious accidents resulted. The mistress of the work-room got an old soldier to guard the door and keep order; but after one or two days' experience, he was so frightened that he left, 'unwilling,' he said, 'to risk having an arm or a leg broken.' Mamma at once decided to take his post, and to shake hands in the passage with each woman, and wish her 'good evening.' She hoped that this confidence in their good behaviour would develop their instinct of courtesy. She was right; where everyone had failed, she succeeded. Order was re-established. These big, rough women defiled one by one, and stopped, blushing with pleasure, quiet and gentle, 'to shake hands with the lady.' "

The pressure of the cotton famine being over, Mrs. Gaskell was able again to turn to her writing, and " Sylvia's Lovers," published in 1863, was the result. It was dedicated " To my dear husband by her who best knows his value." The story dealt with life at Whitby (" Monkshaven "), and the doings of the pressgang about the end of the last century. Truth of local colour was obtained by personal residence in the place for some time; and the book showed a marked advance in skill of construction. In 1863-4, the " Cornhill Magazine " published her " Cousin Phillis," a rural idyll of great perfection. In August, 1864, she commenced in the same magazine " Wives and Daughters," the closing chapters of which she did not live to write. The last portion appeared in January, 1866, after her death, with a brief epilogue by the editor. It was reprinted in two volumes in February, 1866. Though unfinished, it was very near the conclusion; and it is generally ranked as one of her finest works. Some place it in supreme artistic merit. Professor A. W. Ward says: " Its truthfulness

of characterisation, and its beautiful humanity of tone and feeling, ranging from the most charming playfulness to the most subduing pathos, stamp it as a master-piece."

While writing this book, Mrs. Gaskell's strength had given way considerably. It was at the country house at Holybourne, near Alton, in Hampshire, which she had purchased with the proceeds of her last book, and whither she had retired to complete "*Wives and Daughters*," that the end came. She was conversing with her three daughters, on Sunday, November 12th, 1865, when she passed away quite suddenly, and without any warning; her death was due to heart disease. She was buried in the graveyard of the old Unitarian Chapel at Knutsford, where her husband was also laid to rest in 1884.

Thus was suddenly cut short a life which for purity and beneficence could scarcely be excelled. Beautiful in face, especially in early youth, with perfect hands, keen brilliant observing eyes, and expressive features, her books indicated her character. Her speech was candid and frank, and her conversational gifts were of rare excellence. She enjoyed and shone in cultured society, and disliked a quiet monotonous routine existence. To a singularly clear and reasonable mind she united a force of sympathy which infected all who came near her. She disputed Charlotte Brontë's melancholy view of human life, saying, "I thought that human lots were more equal than she imagined; that to some happiness and sorrow came in strong patches of light and shadow (so to speak), while in the lives of others they were pretty equally blended throughout." Another instance of her practical wisdom is in "*North and South*," near the end of Chapter 51, where her hero remarks: "I have arrived at the conviction that no mere institutions, however wise, and however much thought may have been required to organise and arrange them, can attach class to class as they should be attached, unless the

working out of such institutions bring the individuals of the different classes into actual personal contact. Such intercourse is the very breath of life."

While in her later works we may, as the editor of the "Cornhill" remarked in the epilogue to "Wives and Daughters," feel ourselves caught out of a wicked world full of selfishness and base passions, into one where there are much weakness, many mistakes, sufferings long and bitter, but where it is possible for people to live calm and wholesome lives, Mrs. Gaskell's earlier books, "Mary Barton," "Ruth," and "North and South" have the merit of being great achievements in the cause of moral reform. Without obtrusiveness, but with a power which is irresistible by the rational and feeling mind, we are made to realise the evils existing in the states of life described, to sympathise with the sufferers, to earnestly desire means of remedying them. Both "Mary Barton" and "Ruth" deal with social sores, one set open and dangerous to the public peace, the other private, but not less detrimental to personal character. In both cases Mrs. Gaskell has conveyed with absolute purity the true facts to the reader. The genesis of fierce hatred to masters, the incidents of manufacturing disturbances, the by-play of a great law case, the growth of true love in simple life, are depicted with a power which leaves nothing to be demanded.

Georges Sand, only a few months before Mrs. Gaskell's death, observed to Lord Houghton: "Mrs. Gaskell has done what neither I nor other female writers in France can accomplish; she has written novels which excite the deepest interest in men of the world, and yet which every girl will be the better for reading." Her "Mary Barton" will have an enduring place in English literature, for its first-hand testimony, rendered by a discerning witness, to the state of mind existing among many cotton-workers towards the middle of the nineteenth century, for its plain-

spoken exposition of insidious attacks upon virtue, for its analysis of class antagonisms, and their consequences of murderous violence. Nemesis seldom works with truer aim than in its pages; and the downfall of human pride and selfwill is nowhere more pathetically described. The following pages tell their own tale to every heart.

The Rev. Dr. Robertson Nicoll published in the second number of the "British Weekly," November 12, 1866, a brief article in which he speaks of the influence of Mrs. Gaskell on George Eliot. A letter from George Eliot to Mrs. Gaskell is also printed by Dr. Nicoll by kind permission of Miss Gaskell, who thought it deeply touching, as showing the mutual attraction of two great and loving spirits, who *might* have been rivals. Miss Gaskell very well remembers that as Mrs. Gaskell read the first chapter of the first number of the anonymous "Scenes of Clerical Life," she paused, turned to her daughter, and said, "Now, Meta, remember a prophecy that I am going to make. What I am reading will prove to be the work of some very great new writer."

The following is the letter :—

Holly Lodge, Southfields, Wandsworth,
November 11, 1859.

MY DEAR MADAM,

Only yesterday I was wondering that artists, knowing each other's pains so well, did not help each other more, and, as usual, when I have been talking complainingly or suspiciously, something has come which serves me as a reproof.

That "something" is your letter, which has brought me the only sort of help I care to have—an assurance of fellow-feeling, of thorough trustful recognition from one of the minds that are capable of *judging* as well as of being moved. You know, without my telling you, how much the help is heightened by its coming to me afresh now that I have ceased to be a mystery, and am known as a mere daylight fact.

I shall always love to think that one woman wrote to another such sweet encouraging words—still more to think that you were the writer and I the receiver.

I had indulged the idea that if my books turned out to be worth much, you would be among my willing readers ; for I was conscious, while the question of my power was still undecided for me, that my feelings towards life and art had some affinity with the feelings which had inspired "Cranford" and the earlier chapters of "Mary Barton." That idea was brought the nearer to me because I had the pleasure of reading "Cranford" for the first time in 1857, when I was writing the "Scenes of Clerical Life," and going up the Rhine one dim wet day in the spring of the year when I was writing "Adam Bede," I satisfied myself for the lack of a prospect by reading over again those earlier chapters of "Mary Barton." I like to tell you all the slight details, because they will prove to you that your letter must have a peculiar value for me, and that I am not expressing vague gratitude towards a writer whom I only remember vaguely as one who charmed me in the past, and I cannot believe such details are indifferent to you, even after you have been so long used to hear them ; I fancy, as long as we live, we all need to know as much as we can of the good our life has been to others.

Ever, my dear Madam, yours with high regard,

MARIAN EVANS LEWES.

It is much to be regretted that no satisfactory portrait of Mrs. Gaskell exists. Photographs were almost uniformly unsuccessful as likenesses ; and a portrait by G. Richmond, which exists, is not considered an adequate representation of her ; consequently we are unable to present our readers with a portrait of the author of "Mary Barton." But such a lack is not always a great disadvantage. Instead of being confined to one inadequate rendering of a physical form at a particular moment of existence, we are thrown upon our imagination, and must realise for ourselves the soul of the author behind the veil of the book. It is perhaps easier to gain a realisation of the soul and mind

which animated the author of "Mary Barton," than it would be to gain an adequate idea of her figure from an imperfect portrait. She ranks among those spirits who have passed through the sordid courts of festering humanity, recognising and loving the Maker's image, even in the outcast and the tyrant, making plain the path of duty beyond a mechanical routine, sowing everywhere ideals of love and truth which belong to the eternal things.

G. T. B.

* * The Editor acknowledges his indebtedness for many facts to Professor A. W. Ward's biographical notice in the "Dictionary of National Biography," the fullest previously existing; but other sources of information have been used, which are indicated above.

There is an interesting reference to the authoress of "Mary Barton" in the Dickens letters now appearing in *Harper's Magazine*. Dickens writes:—"You have guessed right! The best of it was that she [Mrs. Gaskell] wrote to Wills, saying she must particularly stipulate not to have her proofs touched, 'even by Mr. Dickens.' That immortal creature had gone over the proofs [*North and South*] with great pains—had of course taken out the stiflings, hard-plungings, lungeings, and other convulsions, and had also taken out her weakenings and damagings of her own effects. 'Very well,' said the Gifted Man, 'she shall have her own way. But after it's published show her this proof, and ask her to consider whether her story would have been the better or the worse for it.'" Whatever may have been their respective gifts and popularity as novelists, there can be no question that Mrs. Gaskell had at command a purity of style which was not likely to gain by any admixture of Dickens. His gifts were of another kind,

LITERATURE AND ART.

The following interesting account of Mrs. Gaskell's father is contributed by "E. V. T." to this week's *Athenæum*:—"A new edition of 'Mary Barton' appeared in the 'Minerva Library,' with a biographical introduction by the editor of the series. The introduction is charmingly written, full of penetration, sympathy, and critical ability; but, as one who knew Mrs. Gaskell very intimately, I should like to correct through your widely read paper the impression that might be conveyed by Mr. Bettany's words about her father, of whom she always spoke with the greatest pride and affection. Mr. Bettany's words are that 'Mr. Stevenson was in succession a teacher, a Unitarian minister, a farmer, a boarding-house keeper, and a writer on commercial subjects, finally obtaining the post of Keeper of the Records to the Treasury.' This description suggests simply a 'rolling-stone' kind of person, and gives no hint of Mr. Stevenson's ability and distinction. However, in the *Annual Obituary* for 1830 (Longmans) the notice of him begins thus:—"The literary and scientific world has sustained a great loss in the death of Mr. Stevenson, a man remarkable for the stores of knowledge which he possessed, and for the simplicity and modesty by which his rare attainments were concealed." The article then gives a long account of his career. His father was a captain in the Royal Navy, but his son seems from boyhood to have inclined only to intellectual activity. His earliest post was that of classical tutor in the Manchester Academy, so well known through the Aikins and Barbaulds. After preaching for a short time at a neighbouring Unitarian chapel, and making an unsuccessful attempt at farming in Scotland, he settled in Edinburgh, taking in students for the University to board with him, but at the same time editing the *Scots Magazine*, and 'contributing largely to the *Edinburgh Review*.' Here he was introduced 'to the Earl of Lauderdale, who had just been appointed Governor General of India, and was selected by him to accompany him as his private secretary. But upon repairing to London to make preparations for his voyage, the decided opposition of the East India Company rendered Lord Lauderdale's appointment nugatory. Through his interest, however, Mr. Stevenson obtained the office of Keeper of the Records to the Treasury.' This appointment as Lord Lauderdale's secretary took him up to London, where he lived in Mayfair and then in Chelsea. 'He laboured with unremitting diligence,' contributing to the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Oxford Review*, the *Westminster Retrospective*, and *Foreign* reviews, and writing articles for Dr. Brewster's 'Encyclopædia' and for the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge. 'He had,' the *Annual Obituary* continues, 'the true spirit of a faithful historian, and, contrary to the practice too prevalent in those days, dived into original sources of information.' It is interesting that Mr. Stevenson's nephew, Father Stevenson, S.J., of Farm-street, should have shown the same turn for historical research."

AUTHOR'S 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 careworn 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 consequence 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 workpeople of so miserable a misapprehension. At present they seem to me to be left in a state, wherein lamentation 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.