

THE  
LANCASHIRE  
COLLIER GIRL;  
A TRUE STORY.



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THE

# Lancashire Collier Girl.

A TRUE STORY.

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IN a small village in Lancashire there lived, a few years ago, an industrious man and his wife who had six children. The man himself used to work in a neighbouring colliery, while the wife took care of the family, attended also to their little farm, and minded the dairy, and when all her other work was done, she used constantly to sit down to spin. It will naturally be supposed that the children of such a mother, even when very young, were not suffered to be idle. The eldest daughter worked with the Mother at the spinning wheel, which she learnt to think a very pleasant employment, and she sometimes accompanied her work with a cheerful hymn, or a good moral song, which her parents had taken care to teach her. But the second daughter of the name of Mary, is the chief subject of the present story; when

this girl was nine years old, the honest collier finding that he had but little employment for her above ground, took her to work with him down in the coal pit, together with one of his boys, who was then no more than seven years of age. — These two children readily put their strength to the basket, dragging the coals from the workmen to the mouth of the pit, and by their joint labours they did the duty of one of those who men are commonly called the 'drawers,' clearing there by no less than seven shillings a week for their parents. It must be owned to be not impossible that they may have sometimes exerted themselves even beyond their strength; which is now and then the case with little children through the fault of those who exact the work from them; but since in this case the father had an eye to them during the hours of labour, while they had a prudent and tender mother also, to look after them at home, there is no particular reason to suppose, that at the time of which we are now speaking, they were ever much over-worked.

Here, then, let us stop to remark how different was the case of this numerous family from that of many others, in the same humble situation of life. Mary and her brother, so far from being a burden, were bringing a little a fortune to their parents, even when they were eight or ten years

old; all the family were getting forward by the help of these little creatures, and their worldly comforts were now increasing on every side.

But, alas! in the midst of this cheerful and contented diligence, on a fatal day, while the good man was in the act of fixing a basket in order to its being wound up, the children standing near him in the coal pit, some stones fell from the top of the pit, one of which fell on the father's head, and killed him on the spot. What a melancholy event was this! some dismal circumstances also remain to be told, which were the consequences of it, but in order to relieve the pain of my reader I will here remark, that the most grievous afflictions are often appointed by Providence, to be the means, in one way or other, of calling some extraordinary virtue into exercise; and accordingly we shall see that the calamity which is now spoken of, will introduce Mary the young collier girl, to the farther good opinion of the reader.

The mother, on hearing the news of her husband's death, together with the description of the sad accident which gave occasion to it, received such a shock, that her mind was not able to bear up under it; she became disordered in her understanding, nor did she to the end of her life recover her senses. Being now rendered extremely helpless, she was separated from her children by the

parish officers, who continued to take the charge of her for the space of five years. A short time after the father's death, the eldest daughter (the spinner) married and went from home; two of the brothers (of the age of nine and seven) were bound apprentices by the parish, and also took the charge of two others (one three years old the other an infant) until they should be sufficiently grown up to be bound out also.

In this place I cannot avoid observing, what a blessing it is to poor people in this country, that parish officers are obliged in all such cases of necessity as that of which I am now speaking, to give maintenance to those who apply to them, and what a pity it is that this wise and merciful provision of our laws should ever be abused. Mary the girl of whom we are giving the history having been already trained in industry, was by no means disposed to seek any unnecessary help from the parish, being now between eleven and twelve years old, she determined to maintain herself, like a little independent woman, by her usual work in the coal-pit, where she was generally able after this time to earn at least a shilling a day; in three or four years afterwards, earning no less than two shillings. And now I would ask my young female readers, what they think was the manner in which she employed all this time

of her industry? Do you imagine that she laid it out in vanity of dress, in nice eating and drinking, or other needless expence? or do you suppose that she would now indulge herself in idleness on one or two days in the week, because she had got enough for herself to live upon during the four or five working days! no: I trust you will have formed no such expectations; I hope you will be well aware what Mary did with her money, by having already reflected what you would have done with it in the like case. She in the first place released the parish from the burden of maintaining her mother, which she did as soon as she was arrived at the age of sixteen, being extremely anxious to take this poor disordered helpless parent home to live with herself; she then relieved the parish officers from the charge of one of her brothers, and she continued to provide for him until he died. Having been taught never to consider her duty as done, while any part of it seemed to be left undone, she afterwards undertook the maintenance of one of her other brothers, who remained with her during sixteen weeks illness, at the end of which period she followed him to the grave, burying him at her own expence. After about seven years the mother died also, and was buried in like manner by this dutiful child, without any assistance from the parish,

If any of my readers should here enquire, how it could be possible for so young a child to support all these relations, many of them being also occasionally very burdensome through their sickness? the answer is, that in the case of these extraordinary calls upon her, she used to betake herself to extraordinary labour, sometimes earning no less than 3s. and 6d. in the four and twenty hours by taking what is called "a double turn" in the coal pits.

The ready submission of Mary to her parents when she was in early life, is so pleasing a part of her character, that it may be proper in this place again to make a remark upon it. Let my young readers recollect that in submission to the command of her father, or rather to that law of God which enjoins parental obedience, she cheerfully followed him down into the coal-pit, burying herself in the bowels of the earth, and there at a tender age, without excusing herself on account of her sex, she joined in the same work with the miners, a race of men rough indeed, but highly useful to the community, of whom I am also happy to say, that they have the character of being honest and faithful as well as remarkably courageous, and that they have given moreover some striking instances of their readiness to receive religious instruction, when offered to them.



Among these men, to their honour be it spoken, Mary's virtue was safe, and after the death of her father, she is even said to have received protection as well as assistance from them, her fatigue having been sometimes lessened, through their lending her a helping hand with great feeling and kindness.

But though Mary's mind was naturally strong, and her constitution of body was very stout also, yet towards the end of the period which had been spoken of, she began to be bowed down in some measure by the afflictions and labour which she had endured. It was evident that she had now been led to exert herself beyond her strength. — How lamentable is it that while so many people in the world are idle, and are contracting diseases both of body and mind, from the abundance of their riches and from the want of some wholesome and useful exercise, there should be any bending, like Mary, under their work, hidden in coal-pits, or for some cause or other removed from observation! what a pity it is, I say, that the former should not employ a little of their time and money, in endeavouring to find these distressed objects! And I may also add, how lamentable a thing it is, that while so many poor people are seen, who are apt to complain too soon, there should be any, who do not tell their distresses to those who

can help them (which I trust however does not often happen till) it is almost too late.

I was observing that Mary began about this time evidently to lose her strength, and her head was also troubled by some of those strange and unpleasant imaginations, which are known by persons conversant with the diseases of the poor, to be no unusual consequence of bad food, and great bodily fatigue, joined with excessive grief. At first she was not aware that she laboured under any disorder, for she had seldom experienced ill health, while her relations were alive; and it seems probable that the comfort which she derived from the reflection of affording them support, and the pleasing sensations which arose during the exercise of her attention to them, had served both to keep up her spirits and to prevent her constitution from breaking down.

I trust it is not superstitious to suppose, that when sincere Christians come, as Mary now did, into very trying circumstances, they may hope, notwithstanding any appearances to the contrary to experience still in one way or other, the peculiar blessing of Heaven; I do not expect that such persons will be free from pain, poverty and sickness, or other worldly evils, for it is often quite the contrary, but, then I believe that these very afflictions will be made the means of increas-

ing their trust in God, and prove in the end, (I mean either here or hereafter) to have been entirely designed for their good. The calamities of Mary were now risen to such a height, that those who are not accustomed to view things in this religious and most comforting light, might be ready to imagine, that the Almighty had forsaken her, and that there is little use in serving him. Let us here number up her afflictions. She had seen with her own eyes the dreadful death of her father, she had for a long time witnessed the affecting condition of her mother, who used to follow her about the house without knowing the hand by which she was supported; Mary, besides this, had attended the long and drooping sickness of her two brothers: and now, having fallen sick herself, being both weak in body and sadly enfeebled in her mind, she was dwelling all alone in a little comfortless habitation, having been deprived by death of every one of those dear relatives, the sight of whom had many a time cheered her spirits, while the idea of supplying them with a comfortable subsistence had been used to sweeten her employment, and lighten the severity of her toil.

It was at this period of her extremity that it pleased God to raise up for her some kind friends in the manner which I shall now describe.

A lady of the same village heard that a servant's place was vacant in a neighbouring family, and advised Mary, feeble as she was, to present herself there as candidate to fill this comparatively easy and comfortable situation. Accordingly the poor girl, with anxious heart, went to offer her services; she mentioned, with her usual honesty, what had been the habits of her former life and what was the state of her health also; it seemed undoubtedly much against her interest to do so, but it was perfectly right; and how can any of us hope for the blessing of God, or except any true comfort in our minds when we fall into affliction, if we fly to unfair means of rescuing ourselves out of it: and instead of trusting in God, trust to our own little frauds and crooked contrivances.

The answer made to Mary's application was unfavourable, for it was thought, and indeed it was gently hinted, that a young woman hitherto so much exposed as she had been, was not likely to prove a very fit inmate in a sober private family.

Mary felt very keenly this unhappy suspicion against her character, but what could she do? she walked very quietly away, with a down cast look, and with a mind quite broken down by this fresh affliction and disaster. The owners of the man-

sion happened however to observe her countenance, and the peculiar modesty of her manner, as she was taking her departure, for her patient and silent grief touched them far more sensibly than any loud complaints could have done, and they therefore determined to make some enquiries concerning her. The gentleman went himself on the same day to the colliery, where the master of the pit replied to his questions, nearly in the following terms: "Sir," said he, "she is a poor girl that has over-worked herself, for she has undertaken what we call task work, which is very hard labour; she is one of the best girls that ever I knew, and is respected by all the colliers; and though (added he) I cannot deny that now and then my men take a cup too much, which is apt to make them sometimes quarrelsome, yet they never suffer a bad word to be spoken, or an affront to be offered to a girl in the pit, without punishing the fellow who may be guilty, and making him heartily ashamed of himself."

This rule of decency and propriety towards young women, established by a set of coarse miners, is here recorded for the benefit of some of those persons who are pleased to call themselves their betters.

The gentleman, after a very minute and full ex-

amination, was so well satisfied of the good character of Mary, that she was received into his service, in which she has now been living comfortably for the space of six years. Her health is recovered, her habits of diligence are still very great, and she is said to be of a very remarkable modest, humble, and contented spirit. It may not be improper to mention, that the master of the house in which she is, has furnished all the materials of this story.

I will now take leave of my readers, by remarking, that the little tale which I have been reciting, seems to me to hold out the following useful lessons :

In the first place, I think it may teach the poor that they can seldom be in any condition of life so low as to prevent their rising to some degree of independence, if they chuse to exert themselves, and that there can be no situation whatever so mean, as to forbid the practice of many noble virtues. It may instruct the rich not to turn the poor from their doors, merely on account of first appearances, but rather to examine into their characters, expecting sometimes to find modesty and merit, even in the most exposed situations. This story also may encourage the afflicted to serve and trust God in every extremity; and finally it may teach all descriptions of per-

sons who may have to pass through dangerous and trying circumstances, that they may expect the divine protection and blessing, provided they are not needlessly throwing themselves in the way of temptation, but are endeavouring like Mary, to learn and labour truly to "get their own living, and do their duty in that state of life, unto which it hath pleased God to call them."

FINIS.

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