

That Lass o' Lowrie's,

A STORY OF THE LANCASHIRE COAL MINES.

By FRANCIS HODGSON BURNETT.

CHAPTER II.

But this was not the last of the matter. The rector went again and again, cheerfully persisting in bringing the old sinner to a proper sense of his iniquities. There would be some triumph in converting such a veteran as Sammy Craddock, and he was confident of winning this laurel for himself. But the result was scarcely what he had expected. "Owd Sammy" stood his ground like an old soldier. The fear of man was not before his eyes, and "parsons" were his favorite game. He was as contumacious and profane as such men are apt to be, and he delighted in scattering his clerical antagonists as a task worthy of his mettle. He encountered the Reverend Harold with positive glee. He jeered at him in public, and sneered at him in private, and held him up to the mockery of the collier men and lads, with the dramatic mimicry which made him so popular a character. As Derrick had said, Sammy Craddock was a Riggan institution. In his youth his fellows had feared his strength; in his old age they feared his wit. "Let Owd Sammy tackle him," they said, when a new comer was disputing, and hard to manage; "Owd Sammy'll fettle him—graidely." And the fact was that Craddock's cantankerous sharpness of brain and tongue were usually efficacious. So he "tackled" Barholm, and so he "tackled" the curate. But, for some reason, he was never actually bitter against Grace. He spoke of him lightly, but rather sneered at his physical insignificance; but he did not hold him up to public ridicule.

"I hav' not quite settled i' my mind about th' little chap," he would say tentatively to his admirers. "He's noan siccan a foo' as th' owd un, for he's a graidely foo', he is, and no mistake. At any rate, a little foo' is better nor a big un."

And there the matter stood. Against these tremendous odds Grace fought—against coarse and perverted natures, worse than all, against the power that should have been ranged upon his side. And added to these discouragements, were the obstacles of physical delicacy, and an almost morbid conscientiousness. A man of coarser fibre might have borne the burden better—or at least with less pain to himself.

"A drop or so of Barholm's blood in Grace's veins," said Derrick, communing with himself on the Knoll Road after their interview—"a few drops of Barholm's rich, comfortable, stupid blood in Grace's veins would not harm him. And yet it would have to be but a few drops indeed," he said, "on the whole I think it would be better if he had more blood of his own."

The following day Miss Barholm came. Business had taken Derrick to the station in the morning, and being delayed, he was standing upon the platform when one of the London trains came in. There were generally so few passengers on such trains who were likely to stop at Riggan, that the few who did so were of some interest to the bystanders. Accordingly he stood gazing, in rather a preoccupied fashion, at the carriage, when the door of a first-class compartment opened, and a girl stepped out upon the platform near him. Before seeing her face one might have imagined her to be a child of scarcely more than fourteen or fifteen. This was Derrick's first impression; but when she turned toward him he saw at once that it was not a child. And yet it was a small face, with delicate oval features, smooth, clear, and stray locks of hazel brown hair that fell over the low forehead. She had evidently made a journey of some length, for she was encumbered with travelling wraps, and in her hands she held a little flower-pot containing a cluster of early blue violets—such violets as would not bloom so far north as Riggan for weeks to come. She stood upon the platform for a moment or so, glancing up and down as if in search of some one, and then plainly deciding that the object of her quest had not arrived, she looked at Derrick in a business-like, questioning way. She was going to speak to him. The next minute she stepped forward without a shadow of girlish hesitation.

"May I trouble you to tell me where I can find a conveyance of some sort," she said. "I want to go to the Rectory."

Derrick uncovered, recognising his friend's picture at once.

"I think," he said with far more hesitancy than she had herself shown, "that this must be Miss Barholm."

"Yes," she answered, "Anice Barholm. I think," she said, "from what Mr. Grace has said to me, that you must be his friend."

"I am one of Grace's friends," he answered, "Fergus Derrick."

She managed to free one of her small hands, and held it out to him.

She had arrived earlier than had been expected, it turned out, and through

some mysterious chance or other, her letters to her friends had not preceded her, so there was no carriage in waiting, and but for Derrick she would have been thrown entirely upon her own resources. But after their mutual introduction the two were friends at once, and before he had put her into the cab, Derrick had begun to understand what it was that led the Reverend Paul to think her an exceptional girl. She knew where her trunks were, and was quite definite upon the subject of what must be done with them. Though pretty and frail looking enough there was no suggestion of helplessness about her. When she was safely seated in the cab, she spoke to Derrick through the open window.

"If you will come to the Rectory to-night, and let papa thank you," she said, "we shall all be very glad. Mr. Grace will be there, you know, and I have a great many questions to ask which you must be able to answer."

Derrick went back to his work, thinking about Miss Barholm, of course. She was different from other girls, he felt, not only in her fragile frame and delicate face, but with another more subtle and less easily defined difference. There was a suggestion of the development in a child of the soul of a woman.

Going down to the mine, Derrick found on approaching that there was some commotion among the workers at the pits mouth, and before he turned into his office, he paused upon the threshold for a few minutes to see what it meant. But it was not a disturbance with which it was easy for an outsider to interfere. A knot of women drawn away from their work by some prevailing excitement, were gathered together around a girl—a pretty but pale and haggard creature, with a helpless despairing face—who stood at bay in the midst of them, clasping a child to her bosom—a target for all eyes. It was a wretched sight, and told its own story.

"Where ha' yo' been, Liz?" Derrick heard two or three voices exclaim at once. "What did you coom back for? This is what thy handsome face has brought thee to, is it?"

And then the girl, white, wild-eyed and breathless with excitement, turned on them, panting, bursting into passionate tears.

"Let me a-be," she cried, sobbing. "There's none of yo' need to talk. Let me a-be! I dinna coom back to ax nowt fro' none on you? Eh Joan! Joan Lowrie!"

Derrick turned to ascertain the meaning of this cry of appeal, but almost before he had time to do so, Joan herself had borne down upon the group; she had pushed her way through it, and was standing in the centre, confronting the girl's tormentors in a flame of wrath, and Liz was clinging to her.

"What ha' they been sayin' to yo', lass?" she demanded. "Eh! but yo're a brave lot, yo' are—women yo', ca' yo'rsens!—badgerin a slip o' a wench loike this."

"I did na coom back to ax nowt fro' none o' them," sobbed the girl. "I'd rather dee any day nor do it! I'd rather starve i' th' ditch—an' it's comin' to that."

"Here," said Joan, "gi' me th' child."

She bent down and took it from her, and then stood up before them all, holding it high in her strong arms—so superb, so statuesque, and yet so womanly a figure, that a thrill shot through the heart of the man watching her.

"Lasses," she cried her voice fairly ringing, "do yo' see this? A big o' a helpless thing as canna answer back yo're jeers! Aye! look at it well, aw on yo'. Some on yo's gotten th' loike at whoon. An' when yo're looked at th' child, look at th' mother! Seventeen year owd, Liz is, an' th' world's gone wrong wi' her. I wunnot say as th' world's gone ower reet wi' ony on us; but them on us as has had th' strength to howd up agen it, need na set our foot on them as has gone down. Happen there's na so much to choose betwix us after aw. But I've gotten this to tell yo'—them as has owt to say o' Liz, mun say it to Joan Lowrie!"

Rough, and coarsely pitiless as the majority of them were, she had touched the right chord. Perhaps the bit of the dramatic in her championship of the girl, had as much to do with the success of her half-commanding appeal as anything else. But at least, the most hardened of them faltered before her daring, scornful words, and the fire in her face. Liz would be safe enough from them henceforth, it was plain.

That evening while arranging his papers before going home, Derrick was called from his work by a summons at the office door, and going to open it, he found Joan Lowrie standing there, looking half-abashed, half-determined.

"I ha' summat to ax yo'," she said briefly, declining his invitation to enter and be seated.

"If there is anything I can do for—" began Derrick.

"It is na mysen," she interrupted him, "There is a poor lass as I'm fain to help, if I could do it, but I ha' not th' power. I dunnot know of any one as has, except yo'rsen and th' parson, an' I know more o' yo' than I do o' the parson, so I thowt I'd ax yo' to speak to him about

th' poor wench, and ax him if he could get her a bit o' work as 'ud help to keep her honest."

Derrick looked at her handsome face gravely, curiously.

"I saw you defend this girl against some of her old companions, a few hours ago, I believe," he said.

She coloured, but did not return his glance.

"I dunnot believe in harryin' women down th' hill," she said.

Then suddenly she raised her eyes.

"Th' little un is a little lass," she said "an' I canna bide th' thowt o' what micht fa' on her if her mother's life is na an honest un—I canna bide the thowt on it."

"I will see my friend to-night," said Derrick, "and I will speak to him. Where can he find the girl?"

"Wi' me," she answered. "I'm taken both on 'em whoon wi' me."

CHAPTER III.

THE REVEREND HAROLD BARHOLM.

When the Reverend Paul Grace entered the parlor at the Rectory, he found that his friend had arrived before him. Mr. Barholm, his wife and Anice, with their guest, formed a group around the fire, and Grace saw at a glance that Derrick had unconsciously fallen into the place of the centre figure.

He was talking and the others were listening—Mr. Barholm in his usual restless fashion, Mrs. Barholm with evident interest, Anice leaning forward on her ottoman listening eagerly.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Barholm, when the servant announced the visitor, "this is fortunate. Here is Grace. Glad to see you, Grace. Take a seat. We are talking about an uncommonly interesting case. I darsay you know the young woman?"

Anice looked up.

"We are talking about Joan Lowrie," she said. "Mr. Derrick is telling us about her."

"Most interesting affair—from beginning to end," continued the Rector briskly. "Something must be done for the young woman. We must go and see her,—I will go and see her myself."

He had caught fire at once, in his usual inconsequent, self-secure style. Ecclesiastical patronage would certainly set this young woman right at once. There was no doubt of that. And who was so well qualified to bestow it as himself?

"Yes, yes! I will go myself," he said. "That kind of people is easily managed, when once one understands them. There really is some good in them after all. You see, Grace, it is as I have told you—only understand them, and make them understand you, and the rest is easy."

Derrick glanced from father to daughter. The clear eyes of the girl rested on the man with a curious expression.

"Do you think," she said quickly, "that they like us to go and see them in that sort of way, papa? Do you think it is wise to remind them that we know more than they do, and that if they want to learn they must learn from us, just because we have been more fortunate? It really seems to me that the rebellious ones would ask themselves what right we had to be more fortunate."

"My dear," returned the Rector, somewhat testily—he was not partial to the interposition of obstacles even in suggestion—"My dear, if you had been brought into contact with these people as closely as I have, or even as Grace has, you would learn that they are not prone to regard things from a metaphysical standpoint. Metaphysics are not in their line. They are more apt to look upon life as a matter of bread and bacon than as a problem."

A shadow fell upon Anice's face, and before the visit ended, Derrick had observed its presence more than once. It was always her father who summoned it, he noticed. And yet it was evident that she was fond of the man, and in no ordinary degree, and that the affection was mutual. As he was contented with himself, so Barholm was contented with his domestic relations. He was fond of his wife, and fond of his daughter, as much, perhaps, through his appreciation of his own good taste in wedding such a wife, and becoming the father of such a daughter, as through his appreciation of their peculiar charms. He was proud of them and indulgent to them. They reflected a credit on him of which he felt himself wholly deserving.

"They are very fond of him," remarked Grace afterward to his friend; "which shows that there must be a great deal of virtue in the man. Indeed there is a great deal of virtue in him. You yourself, Derrick, must have observed a certain kindness and—open generosity," with a wistful sound in his voice.

There was always this wistful appeal in the young man's tone when he spoke of his clerical master—a certain anxiety to make the best of him, and refrain from any suspicion of condemnation, Derrick was always reminded by it of the shadow on Anice's face.

"I want to tell you something," Miss Barholm said this evening to Grace at parting. "I do not think I am afraid of Riggan at all. I think I shall like it all the better because it is so new. Every-

thing is so earnest and energetic, that it is a little bracing—like the atmosphere. Perhaps—when the time comes—I could do something to help you with that girl. I shall try at any rate." She held out her hand to him with a smile, and the Reverend Paul went home feeling not a little comforted and encouraged.

The Rector stood with his back to the fire, his portly person expressing intense satisfaction.

"You will remind me about that young woman in the morning, Anice," he said. "I should like to attend to the matter myself. Singular that Grace should not have mentioned her before. It really seems to me, you know, that now and then Grace is a little deficient in interest, or energy."

"Surely not interest, my dear," suggested Mrs. Barholm, gently.

"Well, well," conceded the Rector, "perhaps not interest, but energy—or appreciation. I should have seen such a fine creature's superiority, and mentioned it at once. She must be a fine creature. A young woman of that kind should be encouraged. I will go and see her in the morning—if it were not so late I would go now. Really, she ought to be told that she has exhibited a very excellent spirit, and that people approve of it. I wonder what sort of a household servant she would make if she were properly trained?"

"That would not do at all," put in Anice decisively. "From the pit's mouth to the kitchen would not be a natural transition."

"Well, well," as usual, "perhaps you are right. There is plenty of time to think of it, however. We can judge better when we have seen her."

He did not need reminding in the morning. He was as full of vague plans for Joan Lowrie when he arose as he had been when he went to bed. He came down to the charming breakfast-room in the most sanguine of moods. But then his moods usually were sanguine. It was scarcely to be wondered at. Fortune had treated him with great suavity from his earliest years. Well-bred, comfortably trained, healthy and easy-natured, the world had always turned its pleasant side to him. As a young man, he had been a strong, handsome fellow, whose convenient patrimony had placed him beyond the possibility of entire dependence upon his profession. When a curate he had been well enough paid and without private responsibilities; when he married he was lucky enough to win a woman who added to his comfort; in fact, life had gone smoothly with him for so long that he had no reason to suspect Fate of any intention to treat him ill-naturedly. It was far more likely that she would reserve her scurvy tricks for some one else.

Even Riggan had not perplexed him at all. Its difficulties were not such as would be likely to disturb him greatly. One found ignorance, and vice, and discomfort among the lower classes always; there was the same thing to contend against in the agricultural as in the mining districts. And the Rectory was substantial and comfortable, even picturesque. The house was roomy, the garden large and capable of improvement; there were trees in abundance, ivy on the walls, and Anice would do the rest. The breakfast-room looked specially encouraging this morning. Anice, in a pretty pale blue gown, and with a few crocuses at her throat, awaited his coming behind the handsomest of silver and porcelain, reading his favourite newspaper the while. Her little pot of emigrant violets exhaled a faint, spring-like odour from their sunny place at the window; there was a vase of crocuses, snowdrops and ivy leaves in the centre of the table; there was sunshine outside and comfort in. The Rector had a good appetite and an unimpaired digestion. Anice rose when he entered and touched the bell.

"Mamma's headache will keep her upstairs for a while," she said. "She told me we were not to wait for her." And then she brought him his newspaper and kissed him dutifully.

"Very glad to see you home again, I am sure, my dear," remarked the Rector. "I have really missed you very much. What excellent coffee this is!—another cup if you please." And, after a pause—

"I think really, you know," he proceeded, "that you will not find the place unpleasant, after all. For my part, I think it is well enough—for such a place; one cannot expect Belgravian polish in Lancashire miners, and certainly one does not meet with it; but it is well to make the best of things. I get along myself reasonably well with the people. I do not encounter the difficulties Grace complains of."

"Does he complain?" asked Anice.

"I did not think he exactly complained."

"Grace is too easily discouraged," answered the Rector in off-handed explanation. "And he is apt to make blunders. He speaks of, and to, these people as if they were of the same fibre as himself. He does not take hold of things. He is deficient in courage. He means well, but he is not good at reading character. That other young fellow now—Derrick, the engineer—would do twice as well in his place. What do you think of that young fellow, by the way, my dear?"

"I like him," said Anice. "He will help Mr. Grace often."

"Grace needs a support of some kind," returned Mr. Barholm, frowning slightly, "and he does not seem to rely very much upon me—not so much as I would wish. I don't quite understand him at times; the fact is, it has struck me once or twice that he preferred to take his own path, instead of following mine."

"Papa," commented Anice, "I scarcely think he is to blame for that. I am sure it is always best, that conscientious, thinking people—and Mr. Grace is a thinking man—should have paths of their own."

Mr. Barholm pushed his hair from his forehead. His own obstinacy confronted him sometimes through Anice, in a finer, more baffling form.

"Grace is a young man, my dear," he said, "and not a very strong-minded one."

"I cannot believe that is true," said Anice. "I do not think we can blame his mind. It is his body that is not strong. Mr. Grace himself has more power than you and mamma and myself all put together."

One of Anice's peculiarities was a certain pretty sentimentality, which, but for its innate refinement and its sincerity, might have impressed people as being a fault. When she pushed her opposition in that steady, innocent way, Mr. Barholm always took refuge behind an inner consciousness which "knew better," and was fully satisfied on the point of its own knowledge.

When breakfast was over, he rose from the table with the air of a man who had business on hand. Anice rose too, and followed to the hearth.

"You are going out, I suppose," she said.

"I am going to see Joan Lowrie," he said complacently. "And I have several calls to make besides. Shall I tell the young woman that you will call on her?"

Anice looked down at the foot she had placed on the shining rim of the steel fender.

"Joan Lowrie?" she said reflectively.

"Certainly, my dear. I should think it would please the girl to feel that we were interested in her."

"I should scarcely think—from what Mr. Grace and his friend say—that she is the kind of girl to be reached in that way," said Anice.

The Rector shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear," he answered, "If we are always to depend upon what Grace says, we shall often find ourselves in a dilemma. If you are going to wait until these collier young women call on you after the manner of polite society, I am afraid you will have time to lose interest in them and their affairs."

He had no scruples of his own on the subject of his errand. He felt very comfortable as usual, as he wended his way through the village towards Lowrie's cottage, on the Knoll Road. He did not ask himself what he should say to the collier young woman and her unhappy charge. Orthodox phrases with various distinct flavours—the flavour of reproof, the flavour of consolation—were always ready with the man; he never found it necessary to prepare them beforehand. The flavour of approval was to be Joan's portion this morning; the flavour of rebuke her companion's. He passed down the street with ecclesiastical dignity, bestowing a curt, but not unamiable word of recognition here and there. Unkempt, dirty-faced children, playing hop-scotch or marbles on the flag pavement, looked up at him with a species of awe, not unmingled with secret resentment; women lounging on doorsteps, holding babies on their hips, stared in critical sullenness as he went by.

"There's th' owd parson," commented one sharp-tongued matron. "Hoo's goin' to teach some one summat I warrant. What th' owd lad dunnot know is na worth knowin'. Eh! hoo's graidely foo', that hoo is. Our Tommy, if th' dost na let Jane Ann be, th'at'll be gettin' a hidin'."

It became more evident to him than ever that something must be done, and he applied himself to his task of reform to the best of his ability. But he exhausted his repertoire of sonorous phrases in vain. His grave exhortations only called forth fresh tears, and a new element of resentment; and, to crown all, his visit terminated with a discouragement of which his philosophy had never dreamed.

In the midst of his most eloquent reproof, a shadow darkened the threshold, and as Liz looked up with the exclamation—"Joan!" a young woman, in pit-girl guise, came in, her hat pushed off her forehead, her throat bare, her fustian jacket hanging over her arm. She glanced from one to the other questioningly, knitting her brows slightly at the sight of Liz's tears. In answer to her glance Liz spoke querulously.

"It's th' parson, Joan," she said. "He coms to talk like th' rest on 'em an' he makes me out too ill to burn."

Just at that moment the child set up a fretful cry and Joan crossed the room and took it up in her arms.

"Yo've feart th' child betwix yo'," she said, "if yo've managed to do nowt else."

Liz, a slender slip of a creature, large-eyed and woe-begone, stood up before him, staring at him irresolutely as he seated himself.

"I—I dunnot know nobody much now," she stammered. "I—I've been away fro' Riggan an' afore yo' comin'—if yo're th' new parson," and then she coloured nervously and became fearfully conscious of her miserable little burden.

"I've heard Joan speak o' th' young parson," she faltered.

Her visitor looked at her gravely. What a helpless, childish creature she was, with her pretty face and her baby, and her characterless, frightened way. She was only one of many—poor Liz, ignorant, emotional, weak, easily led, ready to err, unable to bear the consequences of error, not strong enough to be resolutely wicked, not strong enough to be anything in particular, but that which her surroundings made her. If she had been well-born and well brought up, she would have been a pretty, insipid girl who needed to be taken care of; as it was, she had "gone wrong."

The excellent Rector of St. Michael's felt that she must be awakened.

"You are the girl Elizabeth?" he said.

"I'm 'Lizabeth Barnes," she answered, pulling at the hem of her child's small gown, "but folks never calls me nowt but Liz."

Her visitor pointed to a chair contentedly. "Sit down," he said, "I want to talk to you."

Liz obeyed him; but her pretty, weak face told its own story of distaste and hysterical shrinking. She let the baby lie upon her lap; her fingers were busy plaiting up folds of the little gown.

"I dunnot want to be talked to," she whimpered. "I dunnot know as talk can do folk as is in trouble any good—an' th' trouble's bad enow wi' out talk."

"We must remember whence the trouble comes," answered the minister "and if the root lies in ourselves, and springs from our own sin, we must bear our cross meekly, and carry our sorrows and iniquities to the fountain-head. We must ask for grace, and—and sanctification of spirit."

"I dunnot know nowt about th' fountain-head," sobbed Liz aggrieved. "I'm not religious, an' I canna see as such loike folks foak. No Methody niver did nowt for me when I war i' trouble an' want. Joan Lowrie is na a Methody."

"If you mean that the young woman is in an unawakened condition, I am sorry to hear it," with increased gravity of demeanour. "Without the redeeming blood how are we to find peace? If you had clung to the Cross you would have been spared all this sin and shame. You must know, my girl, that is," with a motion toward the frail creature on her knee, "is a very terrible thing."

Liz burst into piteous sobs—crying like an abused child—

"I know it's hard enow," she cried; "I canna get work neyther at th' pit nor at th' factories, as long as I mun drag it about, an' I ha' not got a place to lay my head, on'y this. If it war not for Joan, I might starve and th' child too. But I'm noan so bad as yo'd mak' out. I—I war very fond o' him—I war, an' I thowt he war fond o' me, an' he war a gentleman too. He war no labouring man, an' he war kind to me, until he got tired. Them sort allus gets tired o' yo' time, Joan says, I wish I'd ha' towed Joan at first, an' axed her what to do."

Barholm passed his hand through his hair uneasily. This shallow, inconsequent creature baffled him. Her shame, her grief, her misery, were all mere straws eddying on the pool of her discomfort. It was not her sin that crushed her, it was the consequence of it; hers was not a sorrow, it was a petulant unhappiness. If her lot had been prosperous outwardly, she would have felt no inward pang.

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"I felt it my duty as Rector of the parish," explained Barholm somewhat

curtly, "I the parish, friend to a Joan tur

"The Rev ism concert out.

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"I have e ability to in the ministe: 'I thowt no doubt th Happen the tha had to s than yo' a warrant the an' Lunnon, that she's a but happen here an' Lu that much b has said th this toime, s while."

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