

That Lass o' Lowrie's,

A STORY OF THE LANCAIRES COAL MINES.

By FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT.

CHAPTER I.

A DIFFICULT CASE.

They did not look like woman, or at least a stranger, new to the district, might easily have been misled by their appearance, as they stood together in a group by the pit's mouth. There were about a dozen of them there—all "pit-girls," as they were called; women who wore a dress more than half masculine, and who talked loudly and laughed discordantly, and some of whom, God knows, had faces as hard and brutal as the hardest of the collier brothers and husbands and sweethearts. They had lived among the coal-pits, and had worked early and late at the "mouth," ever since they had been old enough to take part in the heavy labour. It was not to be wondered at that they had lost all bloom of womanly modesty and gentleness. Their mothers had been "pit-girls" in their time, their grandmothers in theirs; they had fared hardly, and worked hard, they had breathed in the dust and grime of coal, and somehow or other it seemed to stick to them and reveal itself in their natures as it did in their bold unwashed faces. At first one shrank from them, but one's shrinking could not fail to change to pity. There was no element of softness to rule or even influence them in their half-savage existence.

On the particular evening of which I speak, the group at the pit's mouth were even more than usually noisy. They were laughing, gossiping, and joking,—coarse enough jokes,—and now and then a listener might have heard an oath flung out as if all were well used to the sound. Most of them were young women, though there were a few older ones among them, and the principal figure in the group—the centre figure about whom the rest clustered—was a young woman. But she differed from the rest in two or three respects. The others seemed somewhat stunted in growth; she was tall enough to be imposing. She was as roughly clad as the poorest of them, but she wore her uncouth garb differently. The man's jacket of fustian, open at the neck bared a handsome unbrowned throat. The man's hat shaded a face with dark eyes that had a sort of animal beauty, and a well-moulded chin. It was at this girl that all the rough jokes seemed to be directed.

"I'll tell thee, Joan," said one woman, "we'st ha' the sweetheartin' w' him afore th' month's out."

"Aye," laughed her fellows, "so we shall. Tha'st ha' to turn soft after aw. Tha conna stand out again' th' Lunnon chap. We'st ha' the sweetheartin', Joan, I th' face o' aw tha'st said."

Joan Lowrie faced them defiantly. "Tha'st mean ha' me sweetheartin' w' siss an' a fo', she said, "I amna over o' men folk at any time. I've had my fill o' em; and I'm noon loike to tak' up w' such loike as this un. An' he's no an' a Lunnoner neither. He's on'y fro' th' South. An' th' South is an Lunnon."

"He's gotten Lunnon ways tho'," put in another. "Chopin his words up an' mince 'em sma'. He's mean Lancashire, on'y gowk could tell."

"I dunnot see as he minces so," said Joan roughly. "He dunnot speak our loike, but he's well enow 'o' his way."

A boisterous peal of laughter interrupted her. "I thout tha' co'd ha' a fo' a minute sin'," cried two or three voices at once. "Eh, Joan lass, tha'st goin' to change thy mind, I see."

The girl's eyes flashed. "There's others I could ca' fo's," she said. "I need na go far to find fo's. Fo's huntin's th' best sport out, an' th' safest. Leave th' engineer alone an' leave me alone too. It'll be th' best for yo'."

She turned round and strode out of the group. Another burst of derisive laughter followed her, but she took no notice of it. She took no notice of anything—not even of the two men who at that very moment passed and turned to look at her as she went by.

"A fine creature," said one of them. "A fine creature," echoed the other. "Yes, and you see that is precisely it, Derrick. A fine creature—and nothing else."

They were the young engineer and his friend the Reverend Paul Grace, curate of the parish. There were never two men more unlike, physically and mentally, and yet it would have been a hard task to find two natures more harmonious and sympathetic. Still most people wondered at and failed to comprehend their friendship. The mild, nervous little Oxonian barely reached Derrick's shoulder; his finely cut face was singularly feminine and innocent; the mild eyes beaming from behind his small spectacles had an absent, dreamy look. One could not fail to see at the first glance, that this refined, restless, conscientious little gentleman was hardly the person to cope successfully with Riggan. Derrick strode by his side like

a young son of Anak—brains and muscle evenly balanced and fully developed. He turned his head over his shoulder to look at Joan Lowrie once again.

"That girl," said Grace, "has worked at the pit's mouth from her childhood; her mother was a pit girl until she died—of hard work, privation and ill treatment. Her father is a collier and lives as most of them do—drinking, rioting and fighting. Their home is such a home as you have seen dozens of since you came here; the girl could not better if she tried, and would not know how to begin if she felt inclined. She has borne, they tell me, such treatment as would have killed most women. She has been beaten, bruised, felled to the earth by this father of hers, who is said to be a perfect fiend in his cups. And yet she holds to her place in their wretched hovel, and makes herself a slave to the fellow with a dogged, stubborn determination. What can I do with such a case as that, Derrick?"

"You have tried to make friends with the girl?" said Derrick.

Grace coloured sensitively. "There is not a man, woman or child in the parish," he answered, "with whom I have not conscientiously tried to make friends, and there is scarcely one, I think, with whom I have succeeded. Why can I not succeed? Why do I always fail? The fault must be with myself—"

"A mistake that at the outset," interposed Derrick, "There is no fault in the matter; there is simply misfortune. Your parishioners are so unfortunate as not to be able to understand you and on your part you are so unfortunate as to fail at first to place yourself on the right footing with them. I say 'at first,' you observe. Give yourself time, Grace, and give them time too."

"Thank you," said the Reverend Paul. "But speaking of this girl—That Lass o' Lowrie's as she is always called—Joan I believe her name is. Joan Lowrie is, I can assure you, a weight upon me. I cannot help her, and I cannot rid my mind of her. She stands apart from her fellows. She has most of the faults of her class, but none of their follies; and she has the reputation of being half feared, half revered. The man who dared to approach her with the coarse love-making which is the fashion among them, would rue it to the last day of his life. She seems to defy all the world."

"And it is impossible to win upon her?"

"More than impossible. The first time I went to her with sympathy, I felt myself a child in her hands. She never laughed nor jeered at me as the rest do. She stood before me like a rock, listening until I had finished speaking. 'Parson,' she said, 'if tha't leave me alone, I'll leave thee alone,' and then turned about and walked into the house. I am nothing but th' parson to these people, and th' parson is one for whom they have little respect and no sympathy."

He was not far wrong. The solid heavy-natured colliers openly looked down upon th' parson. A "bit of a whipper snapper," even the best-natured called him in sovereign contempt for his insignificant physical proportions. Truly the sensitive little gentleman's lines had not fallen in pleasant places. And this was not all. There was another source of discouragement with which he had to battle in secret, though of this he would have felt it almost dishonour to complain. But Derrick's keen eyes had seen it long ago, and, understanding it well, he sympathised with his friend accordingly. Yet, despite the many rebuffs the curate had met with, he was not conquered by any means. He was not an easily subdued nature. He was obliged to bend his head when he passed through the door, and it was not until he had thrown himself into the largest easy chair, that the trim apartment seemed to regain its countenance.

Grace paused at the table, and with a sudden flush, took up a letter that lay there among two or three uninteresting-looking epistles.

"It is a note from Miss Anice," he said, coming to the hearth and applying his pen-knife in a gentle way to the small square envelope.

Not a letter, Grace," said Derrick with a smile.

"A letter! Oh dear, no! She has never written me a letter. They are always notes with some sort of business object. She has very decided views on the subject of miscellaneous letter-writing."

He read the note himself and then handed it to Derrick.

It was a compact, decided hand, free from the suspicion of an unnecessary curve.

"DEAR MR. GRACE,— Many thanks for the book. You are very kind indeed. Pray let us hear something more about your people. I am afraid papa must find them very discouraging, but I cannot help feeling interested. Grand-mamma wishes to be remembered to you.

"With more thanks, Believe me your friend, ANICE BARHOLM."

Derrick retold the note and handed it back to his friend. To tell the truth, it did not impress him very favourably. A girl not yet twenty years old, who could write such a note as this to a man who loved her, must be rather too self-contained and well-balanced.

"You have never told me much of this story, Grace," he said.

"There is not much to tell," answered the curate, flushing again. "She is the Rector's daughter. I have known her three years. You remember I wrote to you about meeting her while you were in India. As for the rest, I do not exactly understand myself how it is that I have gone so far, having so—so little encouragement—in fact having had no encouragement at all; but, however that is, it has grown upon me, Derrick,—my feeling for her has grown into my life. She has never cared for me. I am quite sure that, you see. Indeed, I could hardly expect it. It is not her way to care for men as they are likely to care for her, though it will come some day, I suppose—with the coming man," half smiling. "She is simply what she signs herself here, my friend Anice Barholm, and I am thankful for that much. She would not write even that if she did not mean it."

"Bless my soul," broke in Derrick, tossing back his head impatiently; "and she is only nineteen yet, you say?"

"Only nineteen," said the curate, with simple trustfulness in his friend's sympathy, "but different, you know, from any other woman I have ever seen."

The tea and toast came in then, and they sat down together to partake of it. Derrick knew Anice quite well before the meal was ended, and yet he had not asked many questions. He knew how Grace had met her at her father's house an odd, self-reliant, very pretty and youthful-looking little creature, with the force and decision of half a dozen ordinary women hidden in her small frame; how she had seemed to like him; how their intimacy had grown; how his gentle, deep-rooted passion had grown with it; how he had learned to understand that he had nothing to hope for.

"I am a little fearful for the result of her first visit here," said Grace, pushing his cup aside and looking troubled. "I cannot bear to think of her being disappointed and disturbed by the half-savage state in which these people live. She knows nothing of the mining districts. She has never been in Lancashire, and they have always lived in the South. She is in Kent now, with Mrs. Barholm's mother. And though I have tried, in my short letters to her, to prepare her for the rough side of life she will be obliged to see. I am afraid it is impossible for her to realize it, and it may be a shock to her when she comes."

"She is coming to Riggan then?" said Derrick.

"In a few weeks. She has been visiting Mrs. Galloway since the Rector gave up his living at Ashley-wolde, and Mrs. Barholm told me to-day that she spoke in her last letter of coming to them."

The moon was shining brightly when Derrick stepped out into the street later in the evening, and though the air was somewhat chill it was by no means unpleasant. He had rather a long walk before him. He disliked the smoke and dust of the murky little town, and chose to live on its outskirts; but he was fond of sharp exercise, and regarded the distance between his lodging and the field of his daily labour as an advantage.

"I work off a great deal of superfluous steam between the two places," he said to Grace at the door. "The wind coming across Bogart Bross has a way of scattering and cooling restless plans and feverish fancies, that is good for a man. Half a mile of the Knoll Road is often enough to blow all the morbidity out of a fellow."

Tonight by the time he reached the corner that turned him upon the Knoll Road, his mind had wandered upon an old track, but it had been drawn there by a new object,—nothing other than Joan Lowrie, indeed. The impression made upon him by the story of Joan and her outcast life was one not easy to be effaced. The hardest miseries in the lot of a class in whom he could not fail to be interested, were grouped about that dramatic figure. He was struck, too, by a painful sense of the ingenuity.

"If she had been in this other girl's niche," he said, "if she had lived the life of this Anice—"

But he did not finish his sentence. Something, not many yards beyond him, caught his eye—a figure seated upon the roadside near a collier's cottage—evidently a pit girl in some trouble, for her head was bowed upon her hands, and

there was a dogged sort of misery expressed in her very posture.

"A woman," he said aloud. "What woman, I wonder. This is not the time for any woman to be sitting here alone."

He crossed the road at once, and going to the girl, touched her lightly on the shoulder.

"My lass," he said good-natured, "what ails you?"

She raised her head slowly as if she were dizzy and bewildered. Her face was disfigured by a bruise, and on one temple was a cut from which the blood trickled down her cheek; but the moonlight showed him that it was Joan. He removed his hand from her shoulder and drew back a pace.

"You have been hurt?" he exclaimed.

"Aye," she answered deliberately, "I've had a hurt—a bad un."

He did not ask her how she had been hurt. He knew as well as if she had told him, that it had been done in one of her father's fits of drunken passion. He had seen this sort of thing before during his sojourn in the mining districts. But shamefully repulsive as it had been to him, he had never felt the degradation of it as fiercely as he did now.

"You are Joan Lowrie?" he said.

"Aye, I'm Joan Lowrie, if it'll do yo' any good to know."

"You must have something done to that cut upon your temple."

She put up her hand and wiped the bloody away, as if impatient at his persistence.

"It'll do well enow as it is," she said. "That is a mistake," he answered. "You are losing more blood than you imagine. Will you let me help you?"

She stirred uneasily.

Derrick took no notice of the objection. He drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and, after some little effort, managed to staunch the bleeding, and having done so, bound the wound up. Perhaps something in his sympathetic manner and the quiet consideration of his manner touched Joan. Her face, upturned almost submissively, for the moment seemed tremulous, and she set her lips together. She did not speak until he had finished, and then she rose and stood before him immovable as ever.

"Thank yo'," she said in a suppressed voice, "I canna say no more."

"Never mind that," he answered, "I could have done no less. If you could go home now—"

"I shall na go whoam to nee," she interrupted him.

"You cannot remain out of doors," he exclaimed.

"If I do, it wunnot be th' first time," meeting his startled glance with a pride which defied him to pity or question her. But his sympathy and interest must have stirred her, for the next minute her manner softened. "I've done it often," she added, "an' no'wts never feared me. Yo' need na care, Mester. I'm used to it."

"But I cannot go away and leave you here," he said.

"You canna do no other," she answered.

"Have you no friends?" he ventured hesitatingly.

pen as yo're a gentleman yo' know what I'd loike to say and canna—happen yo' do."

Even as she spoke, the instinct of defiance in her nature struggled against that of gratitude; but the finer instinct conquered.

"We will not speak of thanks," he said. "I may need help some day, and come to you for it."

"If yo' iver need help at th' pit will yo' come to me?" she demanded. "I've seen th' time as I could ha' gien help to th' Mesters of I'd had th' mind. If yo'll promise that—"

"I will promise it," he answered her.

"An' I'll promise to gi' it yo'," eagerly. "So that's settled. Now I'll go my ways. Good neet to yo'."

"Good night," he returned, and covering with as grave a courtesy as he might have shown to the finest lady in the land, or to his own mother or sister, he stood at the roadside and watched her until she was out of sight.

CHAPTER II.

"LIZ."

"Th' owd lad's been at his tricks again," was the rough comment made on Joan Lowrie's appearance when she came down to her work the next morning, but Joan looked neither right nor left, and went to her place without a word. Not one among them had ever heard her speak of her miseries and wrongs, or had known her to do otherwise than ignore the fact that their existence was well-known among her fellow-workers.

When Derrick passed her on his way to his duties, she looked up from her task with a faint, quick colour, and replied to his courteous gesture with a curt yet not ungracious nod. It was evident that not even her gratitude would lead her to encourage any advances. But, notwithstanding this, he did not feel repelled or disappointed. He had learned enough of Joan, in their brief interview, to prepare him to expect no other manner from her. He was none the less interested in the girl because he found himself forced to regard her curiously and critically, and at a distance. He watched her as she went about her work, silent, self-contained, and solitary.

"That lass o' Lowrie's," said a superannuated old collier once, in answer to a remark of Derrick's. "Eh! hoo's a rare un, hoo is! Th' fellys is hauf feart on her. Tha sees hoo's gotten a bit o' schoolin'. Hoo can read a bit if tha'll believe it, Mester," with a touch of pride.

"Not as th' owd chad iver did wot fur her if that road," the speaker went on, nothing loth to gossip with "one of th' Mesters." "He niver did wot fur her but spend her wage I drink. But her wur a neet skoo' here a few years sen an' th' lass went her ways w' a few o' th' steady uns, an' they say as she gotten ahead on 'em aw, so as it wur a wonder. Just let her set her mind to do owt an' she'll do it."

"Here," said Derrick to Paul that night, as the engineer leaned back in his easy chair, glowering at the grate and knitting his brows. "Here," he said, "a creature with the majesty of a Juno—though really nothing but a girl in years—who rules a set of savages by the mere power of a superior will and mind, and yet a woman who works at the mouth of a coal pit,—who cannot write her own name, and who is beaten by her fiercest of fathers as if she were a dog. Good Heaven! what is she doing here? What does it all mean?"

The Reverend Paul put up his delicate hand depreciatingly.

"My dear Fergus," he said, "if I dare—if my own life and the lives of others would let me—I think I should be tempted to give it up, as one gives up other puzzles, when one is beaten by them."

Derrick looked at him, forgetting himself in a sudden sympathetic comprehension.

"You have been more than ordinarily discouraged to-day," he said. "What is it, Grace?"

"Do you know Sammy Craddock?" was the reply.

"Owd Sammy Craddock?" said Derrick with a laugh. "Wasn't it Owd Sammy, who was talking to me to-day about Joan Lowrie?"

"I daresay it was," sighing. "And if you know Sammy Craddock, you know one of the principal causes of my discouragement. I went to see him this afternoon, and I have not quite—quite got over it, in fact."

Derrick's interest in his friend's trials was stirred as usual at the first signal of distress. It was the part of his stronger and more evenly balanced nature to be constantly ready with generous sympathy and comfort.

"It has struck me," he said, "that Craddock is one of the institutions of Riggan. I should like to hear something definite concerning him. Why is he your principal cause of discouragement, in the first place?"

"Because he is the man of all others whom it is hard for me to deal with,—because he is the shrewdest, the most irreverent and the most disputatious old fellow in Riggan. And yet, in the face of all this, because he is so often right, and I am forced into a sort of respect for him."

"Right?" repeated Derrick, raising his eyebrows. "That's bad."

Grace rose from the chair, flushing up to the roots of his hair,—

"Right!" he reiterated. "Yes, right I say. And how, I ask you, can a man battle against the faintest element of right and truth, even when it will and most arraign itself on the side of wrong. If I could shut my eyes to the right, and see only the wrong, I might leave myself at least a blind content, but I cannot—I cannot. If I could look upon these things as Barholm does—"

But here he stopped, suddenly checking himself. "Thank God you cannot," put in Derrick, quietly.

For a few minutes the Reverend Paul paced the room in silence.

"Among the men who were once his fellow-workers, Craddock was an oracle," he went on. "His influence is not unlike Joan Lowrie's. It is the influence of a strong mind over weaker ones. His sharp, sarcastic speeches are proverbs among the Rigganites; he amuses them and can make them listen to him. When he holds up 'Th' owd varson' to their ridicule, he sweeps all before him. He can undo in an hour what I have struggled a year to accomplish. He was a collier himself until he became superannuated, and he knows their natures, you see."

"What has he to say about Barholm?" asked Derrick,—without, looking at his friend, however.

"Oh!" he protested, "that is the worst side of it—that is miserable—that is wretched! I may as well speak openly. Barholm is his strong card, and that is what baffles me. He scans Barholm with the eye of an angle. He does not spare a single weakness. He studies him—he knows his favourite phrases and gestures by heart, and has used them until there is not a Riggan collier who does not recognize them when they are presented to him, and applaud them as an audience might applaud the staple jokes of a popular actor."

Explained even thus far, the case looked difficult enough; but Derrick felt no wonder at his friend's discouragement when he had heard his story to the end, and understood it fully.

The living at Riggan had never been happily managed. It had been presented to men who did not understand the people under their charge, and to men whom the people failed to understand; but possibly it had never before fallen into the hands of a man who was so little qualified to govern Rigganites, as was the present rector, the Reverend Harold Barholm. A man who has mistaken his vocation, and who has become ever so faintly conscious of his blunder, may be a stumbling-block in another's path; but restrained as he will be by his secret pangs of conscience, he can scarcely be an active obstructionist. But a man who, having mistaken the field of his life's labour, yet remains amiably satisfied, and unconscious of his unfitness, may do more harm in his serene ignorance than he might have done good if he had chosen his proper sphere. Such a man as the last was the Reverend Harold. A good-natured, broad-shouldered, tactless, self-sufficient person, he had taken up his work with a complacent feeling that no field of labor could fail to be benefited by his patronage; he was content now as always. He had been content with himself and his intellectual progress at Oxford; he had been content with his first parish at Ashley-wolde; he had been content then with the gentle-natured, soft-spoken Keutish men and women, he had never feared finding himself unequal to the guidance of their souls, and he was not at all troubled by the prospect Riggan presented to him.

"It is a different sort of thing," he said to his curate, in the best of spirits, "and new to us—new of course; but we shall get over that—we shall get over that easily enough, Grace."

So with not a shadow of doubt as to his speedy success, and with a comfortable confidence in ecclesiastical power, in his own ever vested, he called upon his parishioners one after the other. He appeared at their cottages at all hours, and gave the same greeting to each of them. He was their new rector, and having come to Riggan with the intention of doing them good, and improving their moral condition, he intended to do them good, and improve them, in spite of themselves. They must come to church; it was their business to come to church, as it was his business to preach the gospel. All this implied, in half an hour's half-friendly, half-ecclesiastical, conversation, garnished with a few favourite texts and religious platitudes, and the man felt that he had done his duty, and done it well.

Only one man nonplussed him, and even on this man's effect upon him was temporary, only lasting as long as his call. He had been met with a dogged resentment in the majority of his visits, but when he encountered "Owd Sammy Craddock," he encountered a different sort of opposition.

"Aye," said Owd Sammy, "an' so tha'th' new rector, art ta? I thout as much as another ud spring up as soon as th' owd un wur cut down. Tha parson is a nettle as dunnot see dee oot. Well, I'll leave thee to th' owd lass here. Hoo's a rare un fur gab when hoo talks th' notion, an' I'm noan so mich 't' th' humour 't' argy mysen to day. And he took his pipe from the mantelpiece and strolled out with an imperturbable air.

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The Methodists 4 5116—Good 1

From the Clinton On Thursday ing for all the c District, was co Mr. J. H. Elfor spot was well c ly suited for its modation. The of underbrush, a The tents enclo have been asana tents number of if, Phoenix-like, the woods. A preaching stand been combined sides the ordin tents, a large a ing house tent a In the evening weird and fair, aides the light doors, four larz erected, upon colms blaze o the place quitte services. The was made for th and in the comt We have heardn rangements mad could, for all c selves to the utt ing a grand suc ble thing was t by tent holders hearty welcome on the grounds.

"What's the s a supercilious week, to a pro "where do you for this kind of "Is there not in the bible" tioned one.

"No," was th through and ne this in it."

"You had bett the camp meett the close of the you will find so God to the larg in booths for se before the Lord The referenc the feast appoi on the 15th day from a Sabbath harvest had bee oration of Israel when brought t Egypt. The fa posed to argue and left abrupt The services c last, the first s Rev. W. McDor followed by Rev on Friday morn Manchester, pre course, Rev. Me kep preached re noon and eveni up with discou Cook, Bayfield; Livingstone, Ba vings the Congre and there were done. Sunday forward to as th ing, and such it meeting was he Rev. Mr. Hanni first regular pr A number of ni opening exerci Harris, of Brus words—

"The next da ing unto him an of God, which the world."—J The congregat ed attentively t this text, occu delivery. Afte large crowds o Mr. McDonach tor reading and elly on the last preached a mast 9. "And it is every thing th whithersoever I live, and there o of fish, because thither; for the every thing sha cometh."

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