A Life's Lessons

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A LIFE'S LESSONS.

BY

MRS. GORE,

AUTHOR OF
"MAMMON," "MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS," &c.

"Il y a de la poésie dans ce tableau. La vie s'y dresse avec ses haillons et ses paillettes;—mais toute soudaine,—incomplète,—comme elle est réellement,"—Balzac.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1856.
TO THE MEMORY

OF THE

AUTHORESS OF JANE EYRE,

This Novel,

WHICH, HAD SHE SURVIVED, WOULD HAVE BEEN
DEDICATED TO HER,

IS INSCRIBED WITH THE SINCEREST SENTIMENTS OF
ADMIRATION, AND REGRET.
A LIFE’S LESSONS.

CHAPTER I.

Little enough in the aspect of Gridlands to justify even the most imaginative of mortals in selecting it as the home of a heroine:—a mean-looking house, two stories high, constructed, like all the other buildings and boundary-walls of the district, of dingy reddish stone; and opening on an ill-kept, unfrequented road, on the skirts of which were dotted the twenty or thirty tenements constituting the hamlet of Middledale.
Situated in one of those barren districts of North Lancashire, whose aridity affords so strange a contrast to the fertile landscapes of Lakeland, lying within half a day's journey, the long, narrow strip of pasture designated as "the Dale," was surrounded by lofty hills, never rising into sublimity, though inaccessible except as sheep-walks. Here and there, indeed, bold masses of granite obtruded to break the monotonous outline of the hill-side; and in places, rough thickets of furze afforded shelter to bird and beast. But trees there were none; except a few detached and melancholy yews; and the screen of sycamores and limes that adorned the garden of Gridlands.

For, dreary as it looked, it had a garden. After passing through a small hall that divided the house, and the glass-door by which its southern access was effected, you found yourself in a sunny spot; a patchwork of cheerful flower-beds, shaded from the western sun, and sheltered from the far less acceptable easterly
winds, by a mass of well-grown trees, contemporaries of the house, and the pride of the hamlet.

The garden sloped eastward to a beck or burn, scarcely deserving the name of stream; the stony fragments in the bed of which looked, in summer-time, like a long series of stepping-stones rising above the rapid but shallow waters. In winter, however, or after heavy rain, the beck assumed a will and a voice of its own; and nothing was then to be seen on the surface but eddies, and bubbles; with occasional patches of foam, betokening the force of the current as it battled along its uneasy bed.

Even the beck, however, scorned to adorn the unsightliness of that circumscribed landscape by such boons as Earth usually derives from its contact with Water. Not a wild flower along its banks. Only scattered fragments of stone, brought down from the hills, and left encumbering the meagre herbage,
as if for the mere purpose of disfigurement.

At one extremity of the Dale, a dreary moor completed the desolation of the district. At the other, after winding along its tedious causeway for considerably more than a mile, the valley widened. Thickets of trees diversified the scene; and farmy fields—still, however, disfigured by low stone walls in place of the cheerful hedgerows of our southern counties—relieved the eye from the sense of barrenness and waste.

Far in the distance, a heavy line of woods was perceptible; and above them, the purple gleam of the Westmorland mountains. But with these, the inhabitants of Middledale troubled themselves as little as with the misty clouds sailing over all. To obtain their daily bread by the sweat of their brows, demanded unremitting toil; and though mere hewers of wood and drawers of water would have been puzzled to find work in that barren and dry
land, scanty but steady wages were to be earned in the stone and slate quarries. As regarded the female moiety of the community, in that remote district the spinning-wheel was not yet out of date.

The true origin of what, in spite of hard fare and constant labour, might be termed the prosperity of the hamlet, arose from the equality of its inhabitants. They were alike poor, ignorant, and contented. In more civilised places, every homestead has a character and atmosphere of its own. Middledale was as yet homogeneous: built upon common land, on which, from time immemorial, squatters had constructed, with the materials lying on its surface, the hovels which constituted the hamlet; and though there occasionally arose a rumour that the agent of the Earl of Mardyke, lord of the adjoining moors and adjacent manor, was consulting "grand London lawyers" about establishing his right to the green ribbon of turf meandering be-
tween those lonesome hills, nothing ever came of it.

Two only of the inhabitants ever diverged so far from the Dale as the manufacturing town of Ilsington, situated at twelve miles distance: viz., the clergyman—or, as he was termed in the Dale, "the Pairson," and Michael Balfour, the proprietor of Gridlands; the latter, to dispose of his fleeces and the produce of his farm; the former, of the artificial flies of which, in spite of his calling, he was the best, and best-paid, manufacturer in the county.

The word "calling" is used advisedly, instead of the technical word "cloth;" because old David Hurdis was never seen, on week days, otherwise attired than in a Dalesman’s blue smock-frock. Even on the Sabbath, his coat of frieze could scarcely pretend, either in colour or texture, to clerical dignity. But with twelve pounds sterling of yearly stipend to supply food and raiment, even the supplement