



The Moorland Cottage: Classic Novellas

Elizabeth Gaskell

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Novellas and Collections

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, née Stevenson (29 September 1810 — 12 November 1865), often referred to simply as Mrs Gaskell, was an English novelist and short story writer during the Victorian era. Her novels offer a detailed portrait of the lives of many strata of society, including the very poor, and are of interest to social historians as well as lovers of literature. Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, published in 1857, was the first biography of that author.

‘If you take the turn to the left, after you pass the lyke-gate at Combehurst Church, you will come to the wooden bridge over the brook; keep along the field-path which mounts higher and higher, and, in half a mile or so, you will be in a breezy upland field, almost large enough to be called a down, where sheep pasture on the short, fine, elastic turf. You look down on Combehurst and its beautiful church-spire. After the field is crossed, you come to a common, richly colored with the golden gorse and the purple heather, which in summer-time send out their warm scents into the quiet air. The swelling waves of the upland make a near horizon against the sky; the line is only broken in one place by a small grove of Scotch firs, which always look black and shadowed even at mid-day, when all the rest of the landscape seems bathed in sunlight. The lark quivers and sings high up in the air; too high — in too dazzling a region for you to see her. Look! she drops into sight; but, as if loth to leave the heavenly radiance, she balances herself and floats in the ether. Now she falls suddenly right into her nest, hidden among the ling, unseen except by the eyes of Heaven, and the small bright insects that run hither and thither on the elastic flower-stalks. With something like the sudden drop of the lark, the path goes down a green abrupt descent; and in a basin, surrounded by the grassy hills, there stands a dwelling, which is neither cottage nor house, but something between the two in size. Nor yet is it a farm, though surrounded by living things. It is, or rather it was, at the time of which I speak, the dwelling of Mrs. Browne, the widow of the late curate of Combehurst. There she lived with her faithful old servant and her only children, a boy and girl. They were as secluded in their green hollow as the households in the German forest-tales. Once a week they emerged and crossed the common, catching on its summit the first sounds of the sweet-toned bells, calling them to church. Mrs. Browne walked first, holding Edward’s hand.’

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