



Mary Barton

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell

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By Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell (1810-1865)

Mary Barton is the first novel by English author Elizabeth Gaskell, published in 1848. The story is set in the English city of Manchester during the 1830s and 1840s and deals heavily with the difficulties faced by the Victorian lower class.

The novel begins in Manchester, where we are introduced to the Bartons and the Wilsons, two working class families. John Barton reveals himself to be a great questioner of the distribution of wealth and the relation between the rich and the poor. He also relates how his sister-in-law Esther has disappeared after she ran away from home.

Soon afterwards Mrs Barton dies, and John is left with his daughter Mary to cope in the harsh world around them. Having already been deeply affected by the loss of his son Tom at a young age, after the death of his wife, Barton tackles depression and begins to involve himself in the Chartist movement connected with the trade unions. (Summary from Wikipedia)

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