North and South

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ELIZABETH GASKELL

Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson was born to William Stevenson, a civil servant and writer, and Elizabeth Holland Stevenson. Her parents had eight children, but Elizabeth, the last born, was one of only two who survived. Her mother died a little more than a year after Elizabeth's birth, so the infant Elizabeth was sent to the country town of Knutsford, Cheshire, to be raised by her aunt, Hannah Lumb, whom she later described as "more than mother." Elizabeth married William Gaskell, a Unitarian minister, in 1832. They settled in the rapidly growing industrial city of Manchester, where Elizabeth engaged in relief work among the poor and taught Sunday school. Elizabeth had four daughters, though her only son died of scarlet fever at nine months of age. She turned to writing as a distraction from her grief. Her first novel, *Mary Barton* (1848), drew attention to the plight of Manchester's working poor. It also drew the admiration of Charles Dickens, who invited her to submit stories to his periodicals, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. Her most acclaimed novels include *Cranford* and the unfinished *Wives and Daughters*. She also authored a well-known biography of her friend, Charlotte Brontë. Elizabeth Gaskell died suddenly in 1865 and was buried at Knutsford.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

North and South is set near the end of the Industrial Revolution, a transition to new manufacturing methods—including the use of machines, steam power, and the factory system—which began in the late eighteenth century and continued through the mid-nineteenth century. Many of these innovations occurred in Great Britain, whose commercial success—especially in the booming Manchester, nicknamed "Cottonopolis"—was at its zenith around the time Gaskell wrote. Whereas landed aristocracy had dominated England's social structure for centuries, wealthy industrialists, like Gaskell's John Thornton, increasingly rose to prominence. Although the Industrial Revolution contributed to more employment opportunities and an overall improvement in standards of living, the working class—which included women and children—often contended with poor working conditions, long hours, and low wages. Trade unions emerged as a way for workers to collectively bargain for improved conditions, sometimes through labor strikes (work stoppages).

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), based in fictional Coketown, a Northern England industrial town, satirizes some of the same themes of class conflict and industrialization that Gaskell explored a year later in *North and South*. Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849) features a couple who, like Margaret Hale and John Thornton in *North and South*, are divided by issues of class—the industrialist Robert Moore initially rejects the poor Caroline Helstone (whose surname shares the name of Margaret's birthplace in Gaskell's novel). Friedrich Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844) is based on Engels' two-year stay in Manchester, and it critiques the living conditions of industrial workers in ways that anticipate Gaskell's portrayal of life in Milton.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *North and South*
- **When Written:** 1854-1855
- **Where Written:** Manchester, England
- **When Published:** Serialized in *Household Words* in 1854-1855; published in novel form in 1855
- **Literary Period:** Victorian
- **Genre:** Fiction
- **Setting:** The fictional town of Milton-Northern, England, based on Manchester.
- **Climax:** The strikers riot at Marlborough Mills.
- **Antagonist:** John Thornton
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Tongue-in-Cheek Title. Gaskell joked that she might as well have called the novel *Death and Variations* because so many of the story's characters die in rapid succession—each of them, she said, "beautifully consistent with the personality of the individual."

Northern Dialect. Gaskell was fascinated by English dialects and was groundbreaking in her use of a carefully researched Mancunian (Manchester) accent in *North and South*, typically denoting class distinction.

PLOT SUMMARY

After her cousin Edith Shaw's wedding, eighteen-year-old Margaret Hale returns from London, her home for the past decade, to Helstone, the small Southern England village where her father, Richard Hale, and her mother, Maria Hale, still live. Soon after Margaret's longed-for homecoming, however, Mr.

Hale confides that, due to unspecified religious doubts, he must no longer be a minister in the Church of England; the entire family must therefore move to Milton, a Northern industrial city, where Mr. Hale will work as a private tutor.

Soon after their arrival in **smoky** Milton, Margaret meets John Thornton, a young, successful cotton-mill owner who will be her father's primary pupil. Margaret finds him off-putting and "not quite a gentleman." She especially dislikes the antagonistic way he speaks about employers and workers, despite Thornton's own humble background. Thornton, meanwhile, admires Margaret's regal beauty, but thinks her proud.

While walking through the streets of Milton, Margaret befriends a working-class father and daughter, Nicholas Higgins and Bessy Higgins, and begins visiting Bessy often. Bessy, who is the same age as Margaret, is dying of a respiratory illness she contracted after years of working in a cotton mill. Margaret and Bessy often discuss Bessy's yearning for heaven and her dread of the upheaval stirred by strikes, and Margaret comforts Bessy in her illness. Since their move to Milton, Mrs. Hale is also sickened by the smoky atmosphere, and she soon receives a fatal diagnosis. Margaret voluntarily bears the burden of nursing her mother, as well as shielding her father from the news at first.

During his visits to the Hales', Thornton, Mr. Hale, and Margaret have numerous discussions about the cotton industry and class relations in Milton. Margaret argues that the antipathy between masters and workers is due to too little friendship between the groups, while Thornton maintains that she overestimates his personal influence over his workers. While Thornton shows genuine concern for individuals—such as when he brings a fruit basket to Mrs. Hale—Margaret can't reconcile this with his cold application of economic theories.

Thornton's workers participate in a city-wide labor strike, protesting a reduction in wages. Thornton, arguing that the strikers are ignorant fools who don't understand the laws of commerce, brings in strikebreakers from Ireland to keep work going. Higgins is on the millworker union's strike committee. He frequently argues with his neighbor, John Boucher, a downtrodden laborer who's struggling to support many children. Boucher argues that the union is the worst tyrant of all, because it forces people to starve to death rather than oppose the union, and it ostracizes anyone who does.

When Mrs. Hale's condition takes a downturn, Margaret walks to the Thorntons' to ask for a waterbed that will make her mother more comfortable. She notices an ominous murmur throughout the town, and by the time she reaches Marlborough Mills, the crowds, angry about the imported Irish workers, are preparing to break down the factory gate. Margaret begs Thornton to speak to the crowds "as if they were human beings." When he faces them, however, he is defiant, and some men begin to throw clogs at him. Margaret instinctively embraces Thornton to protect him—taking for granted that no one will harm a woman—and is briefly knocked unconscious when a pebble grazes her face. The rioters disperse, and as he carries her to safety, Thornton confesses his love to the unconscious Margaret. The next day, Thornton visits and proposes to Margaret. Margaret is appalled that Thornton saw her protective instinct as anything personal between the two of them, and she haughtily refuses him.

Mrs. Hale, meanwhile, is desperate to see her firstborn, Frederick, before she dies. Frederick has been living in exile in Spain since he helped lead a mutiny against a tyrannical naval captain years ago; if he returns to England, he risks capture and hanging. Margaret accordingly sends him a letter, asking him to risk the journey to England.

Soon, Bessy dies; one of her last requests is that her father be kept from drinking. When Margaret visits the family, she blocks a grief-stricken Higgins from going straight to the gin-shop, inviting him home for tea with her father instead. Mr. Hale and Higgins strike up an unlikely friendship. Higgins explains that the riot brought the strike to an end, and he doesn't know where he can find work.

Not long after, Frederick arrives. The Hales savor a brief reunion before Mrs. Hale's condition worsens, and she dies. While her father and brother are crippled with grief, Margaret takes responsibility for comforting them and arranging the funeral. Before the funeral, Frederick must flee for Spain, and Margaret accompanies him to the train station. Thornton rides by and sees the two together, imagining Frederick must be Margaret's lover. While at the station, a former shipmate of Frederick's, Leonards, recognizes and drunkenly threatens Frederick, who pushes Leonards off the platform.

A few days later, a police inspector informs Margaret that Leonards died as a result of his fall, and that she is rumored to have witnessed the scuffle. Margaret says she was not there, but is ashamed to have lied out of fear for Frederick's safety. Thornton, who's a town magistrate, hears about the case and decides to stop the inquest in order to keep Margaret from public shame. Margaret feels disgraced by Thornton's knowledge of her lie.

The Hales soon learn that Boucher has committed suicide. Later, Higgins tells them he feels responsible for driving Boucher to despair; he wants to take care of the orphaned children, but he's still unemployed. Margaret suggests that he approach Thornton. Thornton rebuffs Higgins at first, but after finding out Higgins is sincere, he comes in person to apologize and invite Higgins to work for him. They slowly gain respect for one another and exchange ideas.

When Mr. Hale goes to visit his friend Mr. Bell in Oxford, Margaret finally has the leisure to grieve and rest from her incessant caring for others. While they are apart, Mr. Hale dies suddenly. A heartbroken Margaret bids goodbye to her Milton friends and returns to London to live with her relatives.

Margaret quickly finds London life even more superficial than before.

With Mr. Bell, Margaret visits Helstone for the first time since she left it two years ago. Margaret is grieved by how much is different there—landscape, people, and parsonage—but soon reconciles herself to the truth that everything changes, including herself. Mr. Bell then dies of a stroke, and Margaret inherits his substantial fortune. She decides she must "take her life into her own hands" and begins planning to use her money to help others.

Back in Milton, Thornton's mill is failing, due to aftereffects of the strike and his own overambition. He refuses to engage in risky speculations and ensures that everyone he owes is paid. In the meantime, Higgins mentions Margaret's brother, and Thornton finally understands what he saw at the train station. Some time later, Margaret and Thornton are reunited at a dinner in London. Margaret hears about Thornton's failure, as well as his newfound ambition to engage with workers "beyond the mere cash-nexus," by involving them closely in both the planning and execution of his ideas. He hopes this acquaintance will lessen the bitterness of any future strikes. When Margaret hears Thornton's new outlook, she draws up a business proposal whereby some of her money can be used to save Marlborough Mills. She and Thornton acknowledge their love for one another and are united at last.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Margaret Hale – Protagonist Margaret Hale is Richard and Maria Hale's daughter and Frederick's sister. At the start of the novel, she is 18 and lives with her cousin Edith Shaw and her Aunt Shaw in London. After Edith's wedding, Margaret returns home to Helstone, a village in Southern England's New Forest where her father is the rector, and a place she has pined for and idealized. She is "not beautiful at all," but is strikingly dignified. She has a natural openness, strong opinions, and a readiness to share what she thinks. Despite her boldness, she is not without suitors and rejects a marriage proposal from her friend Henry Lennox near the beginning of the novel. Because of her father's change of religious views (he is still a Christian but refuses to serve in the Anglican Church any longer), she must soon adapt to life in the Northern city of Milton, where her father has relocated the family. When Margaret meets John Thornton, sue feels contempt for his antagonistic view of manufacturers versus workers. She also rejects his paternalism and can't reconcile his occasional kindness with his cold adherence to economic theories. During the strikers' riot at Marlborough Mills, Margaret shields Thornton from violence, but scornfully rejects his subsequent proposal of marriage. She also befriends Nicholas Higgins and Bessy Higgins soon after arriving in Milton and learns from their working-class perspective. When Mrs. Hale becomes sick and dies, Margaret carries much of the burden of tending to her and arranging the funeral so that Mr. Hale can grieve freely. After Leonards' death, Margaret lies about her presence at the train station out of fear for Frederick's life, and Thornton calls off the investigation in order to protect her. Margaret agonizes over her "disgrace" in his eyes, as well as her failure to uphold her own principles. After her father dies, she returns to London to live with Aunt Shaw and Edith's growing family once again. By the end of the book, Margaret realizes her love for Thornton and uses her fortune (inherited from Mr. Bell) to help him pursue experimental business ventures at Marlborough Mills.

John Thornton – Thornton is a successful, self-made manufacturer in Milton and Margaret's eventual love interest. About 30 years old, he is "neither exactly plain, nor yet handsome," and is "not quite a gentleman," according to Margaret. He has a resolute, inflexible personality, though he can show warmth and kindness to individuals. Thornton's father committed suicide following some foolish financial gambles when Thornton was very young, forcing the boy to find work in a draper's shop and support Mrs. Thornton and his sister Fanny on a very small income. Even then, he formed the habit of scrupulously saving money, enabling him to work his way up to his current prominence. Despite his success, he is aware of the deficits in his education, so he hires Mr. Hale to tutor him in the classics. When he first meets Margaret, he is struck by her queenly bearing, yet equally put off by what he interprets as her prideful air of superiority. Because of his own success, he believes that any decent poor person should be able to raise himself in a similar fashion; failure to do so, in his view, indicates poverty of character. His antagonistic view of the classes earns Margaret's scorn. After Margaret physically defends him during the strikers' riot, though, he confesses his love to her and proposes marriage, but is haughtily rejected. Though their friendship is strained by the rejection and their frequent arguments over trade, Thornton also calls off the investigation into Leonards' death in order to spare Margaret, though he questions her virtue until he finally learns the whole truth of the matter. After Margaret leaves Milton, Thornton's mill fails, due to aftereffects of the strike and his own overambitious mistakes. However, he refuses to join in Watson's risky speculations and makes sure he pays everyone he owes. Instead, he decides to pursue experimental practices which involve much closer cooperation with workers. Margaret agrees to use her fortune, which she inherited from Mr. Bell, to help Thornton regain Marlborough Mills, and they finally admit their love for one another.

Mr. Richard Hale – Mr. Hale, Margaret's father and Maria's husband, is a sweet-tempered parish priest in his mid-fifties. Sometimes emotional and wavering in his beliefs, he is often described as having stereotypically feminine traits. He and his

wife, Maria, have a happy marriage. He has always spent a great deal of time in his study, delighting in "speculative and metaphysical books." However, when Margaret returns from London, she finds him distracted and troubled and soon learns that he has decided to leave the Church of England, as he's harbored agonizing theological doubts for years. Though he still considers himself a Christian, he no longer finds acceptance in the Church of England, which Margaret finds devastating. With the help of his dear friend Mr. Bell, he arranges to become a private tutor in Milton-Northern, with Mr. Thornton becoming his chief pupil. He increasingly leans on Margaret for major household decisions, and after his wife dies, he is so overwhelmed with grief that Margaret must single-handedly make the funeral arrangements. During a visit to Mr. Bell in Oxford, Mr. Hale dies suddenly of heart failure.

Mrs. Maria Hale – Richard's wife, and Margaret and Frederick's mother. Though a daughter of the wealthy Beresford family, Maria chose to marry Richard, a poor country clergyman, and the two went on to enjoy a happy marriage. Mrs. Hale is a kind and gentle soul, but upon her return from London, Margaret finds that her mother has become increasingly fretful, given to petty discontentment about the family's situation in Helstone and grief over missing her son. After the family's emotional and sudden move to Milton, Maria's health declines rapidly in the **smoke**-engulfed city; however, as she gets sicker, her complaining nature becomes quieter and more patient. She receives a fatal diagnosis from Dr. Donaldson about a year after settling in Milton and dies shortly after being reunited with Frederick.

Nicholas Higgins – Higgins, Bessy and Mary's father, is a careworn, middle-aged millworker whom Margaret encounters in the streets of Milton. He tolerates Bessy's colorful faith, but personally believes only in what he knows firsthand (though he eventually admits that he does believe in the existence of God). He is a committee-man for the millworkers' strike and often argues with his impoverished neighbor, John Boucher, over the union's coercive tactics. He tends to drink to excess sometimes and to become belligerent, but he is not habitually drunk. After Margaret stops him from going to the gin-shop after Bessy's death, he strikes up an unlikely friendship with Mr. Hale. After Boucher's suicide, Higgins feels responsible for driving him to despair and decides to help care for his orphaned children. Motivated by this, he stubbornly seeks a job from Thornton, and the two slowly gain respect for one another and eventually collaborate on factory projects.

Frederick Hale – Frederick is Margaret's older brother, firstborn of Richard and Maria Hale. Six or seven years ago, he was involved in some "terrible affair" in the navy, resulting in his being "lost" to the family forever. Later, Margaret learns that Frederick led a mutiny, standing up against a tyrannical sea-captain, and risks hanging if he sets foot in England again. After spending time as a fugitive in South America, he has most recently been living in Cadiz, Spain. When Margaret writes that Mrs. Hale is dying, he risks a trip to England for a brief reunion. He narrowly escapes Milton after Leonards tries to stop him at the train station. Frederick marries Dolores Barbour after he returns to Spain and also converts to Catholicism out of love for her.

Bessy Higgins – Bessy is Nicholas Higgins' sickly daughter, whom Margaret meets in the streets of Milton and befriends. Like Margaret, she is 19, but the contrast between their circumstances couldn't be greater. Bessy is dying of consumption (or perhaps byssinosis), which she has developed after years of work in the cotton mills. She persisted in working despite her poor health out of a desire to be strong and to provide for her family, showing her generous nature. She clings to faith in the Bible, especially the Book of Revelation, and looks forward to life after death to sustain her in her suffering. She develops a deep affection for Margaret. She dies of her illness halfway through the novel.

Mrs. Thornton – Mrs. Thornton is fiercely devoted to her son, John Thornton. She bears with and indulges the weaker Fanny, but John is the pride of her heart. Mrs. Thornton is described as "a large-boned lady, long past middle age," with strong features. She turns heads in the streets because she is so "firm, severe, [and] dignified." However, she is shy in society and ill at ease in meeting new people. She despises Margaret from the moment she hears about the girl's proud demeanor, believing Margaret has disrespected her son. However, she grudgingly respects Margaret's spirit and would like her if she weren't a "prejudiced" Southerner who is ignorant about industry and life in the North. She also looks down on what she sees as the Hales' pretensions of superiority and scorns education as a luxury. She promises to befriend Margaret in the event of Mrs. Hale's death, but she uses this excuse to savagely insult Margaret's virtue. When Margaret leaves Milton, Mrs. Thornton is pleased to be rid of her, little suspecting that Thornton and Margaret will come together in the end.

Henry Lennox – Henry, a lawyer, is Captain Lennox's brother. He is smooth-talking, teasing, and deliberate. He and Margaret enjoy a friendly rapport in London, and she considers him a friend. He visits Margaret in Helstone and proposes marriage, to her shock, and is rejected. Later in the novel, Henry takes up Frederick's case and tries to locate witnesses who could help exonerate him, though he is not successful. After Margaret returns to London, they renew their friendship, and Henry enjoys teaching Margaret about the law after she becomes an heiress. He hopes that Margaret is softening toward him, but before he can propose again, Margaret pursues Thornton instead.

Mr. Bell – Mr. Hale's old Oxford tutor and close friend, Mr. Bell is also godfather to Frederick and Margaret. He is a jovial man in his sixties. It's implied that he is sympathetic to Mr. Hale's religious doubts. A Milton native himself, he helps Mr. Hale

secure a tutoring position in the city and is Thornton's landlord. He and Margaret renew a warm, teasing friendship when he visits the Hales in Milton. He takes a special interest in caring for Margaret after Mr. Hale dies, and they visit Helstone together. Margaret inherits his substantial fortune after his death.

John Boucher – A neighbor of the Higgins family, Boucher is an unskilled worker with a large family to support. He frequently argues with Higgins about the strike, calling the union a pitiless "tyrant" because of its attempts to coerce the wills of its members. He helps instigate the riot at Marlborough Mills. Not long after the riot, an ostracized Boucher commits suicide. Higgins, repentant of his role in pushing Boucher to desperation, takes responsibility for his orphaned children.

George Leonards – Leonards is a former shipmate of Frederick Hale's, known to be a scoundrel. When Frederick is trying to leave Milton undetected, Leonards happens to be in town and identifies him at the train station. Frederick somehow pushes Leonards off the train platform, and Leonards dies from the combined effects of the fall and a previous internal complaint. Margaret is nearly implicated in the affair, but Thornton, the magistrate who took Leonards' deposition, calls off the inquest to protect her.

Mr. Hepworth – The new Helstone rector, successor of Mr. Hale, whom Margaret meets near the end of the novel. He and his wife are described as "stirring people," or at least people who "[turn] things upside down for very little purpose." They are teetotalers (people who never drink alcohol) and try to impose this on the parish, with limited success. Mr. Hepworth remodels the parsonage to accommodate the many Hepworth children. In contrast to Mr. Hale, Mr. Hepworth composes orthodox sermons and is more interested in action than contemplation.

Dixon – Maria Hale's gruff but loyal maid, who sees Mrs. Hale's marriage to Richard Hale as the great downfall of Mrs. Hale's life. She says that she loves Mrs. Hale, Frederick, and Margaret, but no one else in the world. She resents Mr. Hale for spending so much time studying and thinking rather than doting on Mrs. Hale. She remains Margaret's maid after Margaret returns to London.

Fanny Thornton – John Thornton's younger sister. She lacks all of Mrs. Thornton's strong qualities, faints under stress, and often complaints of vague ailments. She was very young during the Thorntons' years of poverty and, because of her brother's success, is accustomed to comfort and ease. She marries Watson, a much older manufacturer.

Edith Shaw – Edith is Margaret Hale's cousin. Margaret has lived with Edith and Edith's mother, Aunt Shaw, in London since she was a young girl. As the Shaw family heiress, Edith is spoiled, but too idle to be very strong-willed. She is also frivolous, sheltered, and self-centered, but Margaret loves her and indulges her. At the beginning of the novel, she marries Captain Lennox, and they live in Corfu for a time before resettling in London. They have two children by the end of the book, including Sholto Lennox, a son.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Dolores Barbour – Dolores is a young Spanish girl, and a Roman Catholic, with whom Frederick falls in love. Frederick goes into business with her father, and he and Dolores marry. Mr. Hale and Margaret meet her only through letters.

Mrs. Boucher – Mrs. Boucher is John Boucher's sickly widow and outlives him for only a short time, leaving her many children in Nicholas and Mary Higgins's care.

Mary Higgins – Nicholas Higgins's daughter and Bessy's younger sister. At age 17 she is an untidy and blundering girl, but capable with housework. She briefly assists Dixon in the Hale household and takes charge of Boucher's children after they are orphaned.

Dr. Donaldson – Donaldson is a Milton doctor recommended by the Thorntons to care for Mrs. Hale in her fatal illness. He is a compassionate man, quickly won over by Margaret's strength and forthrightness.

Captain Lennox – An Army captain, Lennox marries Edith Shaw at the beginning of the novel. He is kind and brotherly to Margaret.

Aunt Shaw – A gentle, anxious widow whose marriage had been unhappy, Margaret's aunt lives in London. She is Edith's mother and Maria Hale's sister. She is very concerned about upper-class proprieties and finds Milton, as well as Margaret's accustomed freedoms there, "horrid."

Sholto Lennox – Captain Lennox and Edith Shaw's baby son.

Martha – One of the Hales' household maids in Milton.

Watson – Watson is a wealthy industrialist who marries the much younger Fanny Thornton. He engages in risky speculations and succeeds spectacularly, and everyone praises his foresight and wisdom.

Mr. Colthurst – A member of parliament who visits the Lennox household at the end of the novel and talks with Thornton.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

NOSTALGIA AND IDENTITY

Throughout *North and South*, Elizabeth Gaskell's novel set in a Northern England industrial city, protagonist Margaret Hale frequently reminisces about Helstone, her home village in Southern England. Through the upheaval of several moves—from London to Helstone, from Helstone to Milton, and from Milton to London again—Helstone is an emotional mainstay for Margaret. The nature of Margaret's nostalgia for Helstone changes, however, depending on her circumstances. By portraying Helstone through Margaret's changing perceptions, Gaskell argues that nostalgia is often a misrepresentation of the reality of the past, and that it reveals more about the person remembering than about the place being remembered.

At first, Margaret sees Helstone through a sentimental lens. When Henry Lennox, cousin Edith's future brother-in-law, asks Margaret about Helstone, he teases her that her description is picturesque, "like a village in a tale rather than in real life." Defensively, Margaret replies, "I am trying to describe Helstone as it really is," but quickly agrees that it is "like a village … in one of Tennyson's poems." Having spent most of her youth missing Helstone, Margaret reaches for romantic comparisons. When Margaret returns to Helstone after Edith's wedding, her home at first "realized all [her] anticipations." She delights in the **natural environment** and simpler rhythms of life, especially compared to London, and in contrast to the discontentment she unexpectedly perceives in her parents' lives. When Henry comes to visit, she takes him out to sketch the village, determined to capture some cottages that had "[reproached] me for not having sketched them." Margaret still views Helstone as if it is something she can possess and display as her own. However, she can idealize for only a short time: Henry's undesired proposal of marriage and her father's abandonment of the priesthood soon thereafter taint Margaret's idyllic homecoming. Margaret's sentimental view of Helstone, based on homesickness, can't hold up to the reality that, like any place, it's touched by heartache and failure.

In Milton, Margaret remembers Helstone primarily in contrast to both the collective and familial suffering she sees around her. In doing so, however, she illuminates more about her own past than she does about the reality of Helstone. When Bessy Higgins, Margaret's new friend who's dying of an illness contracted at work, asks about Margaret's origins, Margaret speaks about Helstone for the first time since leaving it. She tells Bessy, "I cannot tell you half its beauty," and waxes poetic about its lush trees, its birdsong, and the sharp voice of a distant farmer, which only "reminded me pleasantly that other people were hard at work … while I just sat on the heather and did nothing." The description—contrasting with the industrial, **gray** harshness of Milton—is intended to soothe Bessy, but it also betrays Margaret's comfortable upbringing; she was free to enjoy leisure while others labored. In Milton, she is forced to see the sufferings of laborers up close.

When Thornton, Mr. Hale's pupil and a cotton-mill owner, brings Margaret's invalid mother a fruit basket, Mr. Hale remembers the currants that grew in their Helstone garden. Margaret, strained from the millworkers' strike, Thornton's proposal, and her mother's illness, finds that her father's casual remark reduces her to sobs: "Did she not remember every weather-stain on the old stone wall; the grey and yellow lichens that marked it like a map…?" Minute details of home come to mind when she's under the strain of circumstances she would never have faced if they had not left. Her view of Helstone is no longer simply one of naïve sentimentality about the South, but of firsthand knowledge of sufferings peculiar to the North. Though her loved ones' illnesses tempt Margaret to think of Helstone as a haven from suffering, this is a reaction to Margaret's current stressful environment, not an accurate reflection of Helstone itself.

After her parents' deaths, Margaret revisits Helstone with her father's dear friend, Mr. Bell. Observing its changes, she realizes that she can no longer idealize Helstone. Margaret is pained by "every familiar tree so precisely the same in its summer glory as it had been in former years." Returning a more mature person, she finds it's painful both to witness familiar beauties without her parents and to see evidence of life moving on in her absence. Visiting a local family, Margaret is appalled when the widow tells her that a neighbor had stolen and burned her cat, a charm believed to bring about the fulfillment of one's wishes. Margaret walks away "sick at heart" at this "savage country superstition." This shocking encounter suggests that Helstone, like Milton, harbors its share of darkness and suffering—something Margaret had been slower to recognize before her Milton years. Though Margaret feels overcome by changes in Helstone, she concludes that she must look beyond these changes' personal impact, because "the progress all around me is right and necessary" in its effects on others. Having resolved thus, Margaret finds that Helstone is "reinvested with the old enchanting atmosphere." As long as she observes Helstone in light of her own memories, she can't see it for what it truly is—a place both beautiful and flawed, not just an ideal on which to project her own yearnings.

Though Margaret decides that revisiting Helstone is an experience too painful to be repeated, Helstone remains an indelible part of her identity. When Margaret and Thornton are united at the end of the novel, Thornton shows her some dried roses he has carried; he had gathered them on a visit to Helstone "to see the place where Margaret grew to what she is." Though Margaret's earlier nostalgia is inevitably colored by idealism and homesickness, Helstone's formative influence upon her is not an illusion; there, Margaret first started to become the strong, compassionate woman who is able to be Thornton's match by the end of the story. This shows that, ultimately, nostalgia can't do justice to the reality of beloved

places; sometimes only change and distance can reveal them in their full complexity.

FEMALE AGENCY AND STRENGTH

At the beginning of *North and South*, Margaret Hale's first occasion for "usefulness" comes when she passively models some shawls for her Aunt Shaw's company, an activity she finds amusing but "ludicrous." While she and her friend Henry Lennox talk about it afterward, she reflects that she is caught up in a "never-ending commotion about trifles" as she helps cousin Edith prepare for her wedding. Upon her return to Helstone, however, Margaret must shoulder an escalating series of non-trifling problems, making serious decisions and taking initiative both at home and in public. Through Margaret, Gaskell models the ideal woman as one who acts, leads, and solves problems. More than that, the ideal woman shows quiet, persevering strength that bears others' burdens and shields others from harm.

Margaret repeatedly takes on "head of household" responsibilities—such as relaying bad news, planning a household move, making funeral arrangements, and providing spiritual leadership—that would traditionally be expected to fall upon her father. After Mr. Hale tells Margaret about his change of theological views, necessitating his leaving the Church of England, he asks a reeling Margaret to tell her mother that the family must move to Milton. Margaret is aware that "it was an error in her father to have left [Mrs. Hale] to learn his change of opinion … from her better-informed child." Despite her discomfort with her father's decision and his handling of the fallout, she faces the dreadful conversation the following day, so that her father doesn't have to.

Not only must Margaret be the voice of uncomfortable realities, she must also shoulder the responsibility of preparations for their move, because her father is too depressed to make the required decisions. After the relatively superficial duties of attending Edith in London, now every day "startled her into a decision … momentous to her, and to those whom she loved, to be settled." This role is jarring for Margaret, but she does what is required of her. When a dying Mrs. Hale begs Margaret to write to her exiled son Frederick (a navy mutineer), Margaret acts quickly, despite her fears of Frederick's capture and hanging if he returns to England. Her father approves her actions, acknowledging that "I durst not have done it myself." Mrs. Hale recognizes the shifting dynamic in their household and leans on Margaret accordingly. When Boucher, an aggrieved millworker, commits suicide, it also falls to Margaret to tell his widow the news. "If I had time to think of what I had better say; but all at once—" begins the trembling Mr. Hale. Margaret doesn't need to be asked; by now, assuming such burdens is becoming habitual. After Mrs. Hale dies, Mr. Hale appears lost, stroking his wife's face and making soft noises like "some mother-animal caressing her young."

Meanwhile, all of the funeral preparations devolve upon Margaret; as her father and brother fulfill the traditionally feminine role of unabashed grieving, "she must be working, planning, considering." Margaret's leadership in such matters is now taken for granted within the household; she subordinates her own grief in order to tend to the needs of her family.

Margaret also occupies a kind of priestly role within the household. In the face of Mr. Hale's and Frederick's helpless grief, Margaret, "without a word of preparation … with a clearness of sound that startled even herself," begins reciting the 14th chapter of the Gospel of John. Before her mother's funeral, Mr. Hale asks for her prayers, and "almost supporting him in her arms," Margaret recites all the comforting verses of Scripture she can remember. Far from shrinking from such a task, "she herself gained strength by doing this." Margaret not only tends to others' needs, but actively bears their burdens and heals their wounds out of her own strength.

Margaret not only assumes leadership at home; she also puts herself in harm's way in public, showing her willingness to put herself at risk in order to forestall violence. Margaret's courage is on full display when she faces the mob that has come to confront Thornton, master of Marlborough Mills. When she sees men about to throw their shoes at Thornton, she makes herself a human shield, supposing that the mob wouldn't dare harm a woman. This is a miscalculation, but the sight of Margaret, bleeding and unconscious after being struck with a pebble, does help persuade the crowd to retreat. The realization that they've injured a woman shames the crowd and prevents them from attempting to do further harm. In the aftermath, Mrs. Thornton reacts with scorn to Margaret's actions, retorting to her son that "a girl in love will do a good deal," as though such behavior is only comprehensible as an act of love. Later, Margaret, knowing she is being viewed as a "romantic fool," despairs at this interpretation, but determines that she can bear the insult because, by forestalling greater violence, she has done "a woman's work." She later tells Thornton that any woman would "feel the sanctity of our sex as a high privilege when we see danger." In other words, Margaret believes that, because it's taboo to strike a woman, women have a carte blanche to insert themselves in dangerous situations; by so doing, they can act on behalf of the defenseless. A similar standoff occurs when, following Bessy Higgins's death, Margaret stands in front of grief-stricken Nicholas Higgins to stop him from going to the gin-palace, though he looks angry enough to strike Margaret. She then persuades Higgins to accompany her home for tea instead—again, using a feminine prerogative (this time, hospitality) to de-escalate the situation.

It's worth noting that Margaret's strength and agency are rooted in Victorian-era gender ideals of quietness, gentleness, and stainless virtue. Nevertheless, Gaskell does present Margaret as an empowered woman whose everyday endurance

and courage amidst danger are as indispensable as the raw strength and public prominence of the men around her.

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND CONSCIENCE

A Unitarian descended from Dissenters (non-Anglican Protestants), Gaskell makes religion a recurrent theme in *North and South*. Throughout the novel, she highlights several characters—including Margaret Hale's minister father, as well as Nicholas and Bessy Higgins, a working-class father and daughter Margaret befriends in Milton—who seek to live according to conscience in the matter of religion, despite disapprobation from those around them or of society at large. In fact, Margaret herself is the only major character who is portrayed as a mainstream, orthodox member of the Church of England. By portraying diverse beliefs through Margaret's eyes, Gaskell makes the case—a broad-minded one for her time—that there is a spectrum of valid religious worldviews, and that respect for individual conscience is paramount.

Though Mr. Hale's defection from the Church of England is devastating for Margaret and sets in motion much upheaval, it is portrayed as a necessary move for conscience's sake and not as an obstacle to Mr. Hale's Christian integrity. Shortly after her return to Helstone, Margaret is shocked by her father's revelation that he must no longer be a minister, as he can no longer uphold Anglican doctrines with a clear conscience. Though the precise nature of Mr. Hale's "smoldering doubts" is never revealed (Margaret finds them "as terribly mysterious as if [he] were about to turn [Muslim]"), he maintains that he has "no doubts as to religion; not the slightest injury to that." The two later recite the Lord's Prayer together, showing that Mr. Hale's basic Christian convictions remain intact.

Mr. Hale's change of views necessitates the family's rapid removal from Helstone and into a more financially tenuous position in Milton, by which Gaskell demonstrates the personal and social cost of dissent from England's established church. Despite all the tragedy that follows the family's move to Milton, including his wife's illness and death, Mr. Hale maintains that he made the right decision, telling his friend Mr. Bell, "You're not to think, that if I could have foreseen all that would come … that I would undo it." Bell replies, "[God] gave you strength to do what your conscience told you was right; and I don't see that we need any higher or holier strength than that." Gaskell affirms that, while religious dissent is not without tangible cost, it is worth following for conscience's sake.

Despite Higgins's and Margaret's criticisms that her religious views are naïve and morbid, Bessy Higgins gives a cogent defense of the ways her faith supports her through the sufferings of life. Though Bessy's father often complains that her faith fills her "so full of th' life to come, [she] cannot think of th' present," Bessy finds a tangible solace in her faith that frees her, albeit briefly, from the ever-present burdens of her surroundings. After they've discussed the violence surrounding the millworkers' strike, Bessy asks Margaret to read "some thoughts of the world that's far away to take the weary taste of [this world] out o' my mouth … pictures … which I see when my eyes are shut." Though otherworldly, Bessy's faith has a vivid sensory aspect that doesn't deny her anxieties, but elevates her above them. When Margaret tells Bessy that God doesn't willingly afflict anyone, Bessy explains that she believes herself specially predestined to suffer. She tells Margaret, "One can bear pain and sorrow better if one thinks it has been prophesied long before for one … otherways it seems all sent for nothing." Bessy uses biblical prophecies to invest her suffering with purpose, and she doesn't allow Margaret to dissuade her from this interpretation. By this, Gaskell shows that Bessy's faith, unsophisticated as it may be, is also valid, and that the dignity of her conscience should be affirmed as well.

Mr. Higgins, though seemingly an opponent of organized religion throughout the book, is portrayed as a discerning critic and is ultimately vindicated as a believer in God. When Margaret expresses surprise at Higgins's seeming disbelief, he retorts, "I believe what I see, and no more … I say, leave a' this talk about religion alone, and set to work on what yo' see and know. That's my creed." In contrast to his daughter's trust in the unseen, Higgins believes that dwelling on faith distracts from visible needs. When Higgins discusses religion with Mr. Hale, he explains that the sufferings of Milton workers shape their faith or lack thereof: "I reckon you'd not ha' much belief in yo' if yo' lived here… Lord, sir, d'ye think their first cry i' the morning is, 'What shall I do to get hold on eternal life?' or 'What shall I do to fill my purse this blessed day?'" Not only does Higgins believe that religion makes people passive, he also perceives that the strain in people's environment directly shapes their capacity for belief. Yet, despite his avowals of unbelief, following Bessy's death Higgins acknowledges that he believes in a God who is the "one thing steady and quiet i' all this reeling world," and he consents to pray with Anglican Margaret and her Dissenting father. Far from denigrating Higgins, Gaskell portrays him as a thoughtful critic, capable of belief in God despite no discernible allegiance to an organized religious tradition.

It's noteworthy that Mr. Hale is not the first religious dissenter in the Hale family. In an understated aside, Gaskell reveals that Margaret's brother, Frederick, is himself a Roman Catholic convert—a shocking development, given that legal restrictions against English Catholics had only been repealed within the past two decades. Because of the way religious dissent has been handled earlier in the book, Frederick's Catholicism hardly causes a ripple at this point. Gaskell not only makes a positive case for diverse viewpoints, but also acknowledges a diversity of motivations for different views—including theological conviction, personal experience, social concern,

and, in Frederick's case, romantic attachment.

CLASS ANTAGONISM

Early in *North and South*, Margaret Hale expresses a dislike of "shoppy people," protesting, "I'm sure you don't want me to admire butchers and bakers, and candlestick-makers, do you, mamma?" Indeed, this type of class-based prejudice is pervasive throughout the book. However, as Margaret gets to know the Milton manufacturer, Thornton, and his downtrodden employee, Higgins, her preconceptions are challenged, and she wants "masters and men" to better understand one another, too. By using transplanted Southerner Margaret as a mediating figure, Gaskell argues that the antagonistic relationship between the classes can only be overcome through personal relationships.

From the beginning of Margaret's acquaintance with the Thorntons and with Higgins, she hears antagonistic, abstracted, and even dehumanizing language directed toward and used about the respective classes. One day Margaret hears Thornton extolling industry as "the war which compels, and shall compel, all material power to yield to science." This martial language carries over into his characterization of the relationship between masters of industry and their men. He argues that, nowadays, "the battle is pretty fairly waged between" the two classes. He explains that any hardworking man of decency and sobriety can join the ranks of the masters. Margaret is repelled by Thornton's implication that those who fail to raise themselves in this fashion are his "enemies."

Mrs. Thornton shares her son's antagonistic view of things in Milton, describing the striking millworkers as "a pack of ungrateful hounds" who want to defeat and enslave their masters, resulting in a perennial "struggle between masters and men." She also describes the "continual murmur of the work-people" as "the humming of a hive of bees." She doesn't readily think of them as human beings, much less as individuals, whose interests should be taken into consideration by their employers.

When Margaret hears Thornton discussing market theories "as if commerce were everything and humanity nothing," her "whole soul rose up against him." She can't reconcile Thornton's compassionate attentions to her dying mother with his "hard-reasoning, dry, merciless" approach to business; "the discord jarred upon her inexpressibly." To Margaret, commerce should account for human sufferings in a manner akin to everyday neighborly concern. Even the millworkers' union, in its efforts to secure justice for the masses, can run roughshod over the sufferings of its individual members, as Margaret learns when she hears the struggling John Boucher confronting union leader Higgins. "'[Starve] to death… ere yo' dare go again th' Union.'… Yo' may be kind hearts, each separate; but once banded together, yo've no more pity for a man than a wild hunger-maddened wolf." When Margaret responds with horror to the ostracism experienced by workers who defy the union, Higgins defends this practice on the grounds that the union's work "may be like war; along wi' it come crimes; but I think it were a greater crime to let [injustice] alone." Though couched in earthier language, the union's view of the masters is as antagonistic as its opposite, and as apt to gloss over individual relationships.

In her conversations with various characters, especially master Thornton and worker Higgins, Margaret repeatedly encourages personal relationship as the only bridge across the antagonistic class divide. Margaret argues with Thornton that masters treat their workers like oversized children. As her father points out, the constant antagonism between classes exists because there has been no "equality of friendship between the adviser and advised classes," with each side "constantly afraid of his rights being trenched upon." In contrast, Margaret says, God has created all people to be mutually dependent.

During the confrontation at Marlborough Mills, Thornton says that bringing in soldiers is the only means of reasoning with "men that make themselves into wild beasts." Nevertheless, Margaret begs him to "face them like a man … speak to your workmen as if they were human beings." Though frightened herself by the "demoniac desire" of the crowd, she perceives that a humanizing approach is the only way through the violent impasse. After the beleaguered Boucher commits suicide, Higgins comes around to Margaret's view that the union had driven Boucher to despair, and he takes personal responsibility for the feeding and schooling of the orphaned children. Thornton eventually sets up a dining room for his workers, and, though initially "riled" by Higgins' interfering advice, agrees to cooperate with him in carrying out the plan, even dining with the workers occasionally. Later, he reflects that his acquaintance with Higgins has changed his attitudes, and vice versa: "Once brought face to face, man to man, with an individual of the masses around him … they had each begun to recognize that 'we have all of us one human heart.'" Thornton's conversations with Margaret have borne fruit in tangible relationships and changed policy.

After the failure of Marlborough Mills, Thornton wants his next industrial venture to be based on relationship with the workers "beyond the mere 'cash nexus,'" having become convinced that "no mere institutions … can attach class to class as they should be attached, unless the working out of such institutions bring the individuals of the different classes into actual personal contact." While he expects that strikes will still occur, such personal contact "may render strikes not the bitter, venomous sources of hatred they have hitherto been." Thornton's attitude toward his workers is no longer relentlessly antagonistic, and he has modified his abstract economic theories to make room for insights gained through personal attachment.

Though Thornton's newly progressive theories triumph at the

end of the novel, Gaskell doesn't get into great detail about what they are. She likely wanted to avoid greater controversy—and hoped that Margaret's and Thornton's long-delayed union provided a satisfying enough ending. In any case, Margaret's willingness to actively support, even join forces, with Thornton's new venture shows just how far she has come from her early prejudice against "shoppy people."

PERSONAL CHARACTER, ENVIRONMENT, AND CHANGE

At the time Gaskell wrote *North and South*, the surroundings in which one spent one's life were thought to bear a tremendous weight on one's character, and indeed on one's capacity for change. Gaskell allows for the importance of environment, but also shows people's character—especially Thornton's and Margaret's—changing substantially in response to changed environments, personal challenges, and interactions with others. Through such transformations, Gaskell demonstrates that environment alone is not determinative for a person's character; experiences and relationships are vital, and these can exert formative influence at any time in a person's life.

Gaskell shows that the environment into which one is born, and the experiences of early life, certainly bear a significant shaping influence on a person's character. When discussing the relative merits of city and country life, Margaret observes that city life "[induces] depression and worry of spirits," but Mr. Hale points out that country life can promote stagnation and fatalism. Margaret concludes that "each mode of life produces its own trials and its own temptations."

While arguing with Margaret about the differences between classes, Thornton interjects that he is not "speaking without book" (that is, without firsthand knowledge). After his father's early death, he explains, he was forced to find work as a shop assistant and to provide for the family out of his limited earnings. He feels, therefore, that his current position is not the result of "good luck, nor merit, nor talent—but simply the habits of life which taught me to despise indulgences not thoroughly earned." He further believes that the suffering of Milton's poor is "the natural punishment of dishonestly-enjoyed pleasure, at some former period of their lives"—that is, reflective of poorness of character. The irony is that, just as Thornton is piqued by Margaret's assumptions about his background, he also makes assumptions about people (his poor workers) whose full stories he doesn't know. He also assumes that, once "habits of life" are formed, they set the course for the rest of one's life.

However, character is not preordained by one's environment or set in stone in one's youth. Margaret observes the change which suffering has produced in her mother's character. In Helstone, Margaret had been troubled by Mrs. Hale's "querulousness," but a year later, her mother has acquired new patience through illness—she is "gentle and quiet in intense bodily suffering, almost in proportion as she had been restless and depressed" when she had little reason to be.

Upon their first acquaintance, Mrs. Thornton had told Margaret, "If you live in Milton, you must learn to have a brave heart." At that early point in the story, Margaret had been intimidated by the crowds of workers in the streets. After a year in Milton, however, she feels able to walk home in the dark, telling her brother Frederick, "I am getting very brave and hard." By the end of the story, cousin Edith complains that Margaret is constantly "[poking] herself into" "wretched places … not fit for ladies" after she moves back to London. Over time, Margaret has learned how to adapt to and even feel at home in environments very different from those in which she had been raised. Once she is back in London, in fact, Margaret finds that her relatives' insulated lifestyle no longer suits her: "She found herself at once an inmate of a luxurious house, where the bare knowledge of the existence of every trouble or care seemed scarcely to have penetrated." Her childhood environment no longer fits the kind of person that Milton has helped her become.

During one of their arguments, Margaret tells Thornton that "the most proudly independent man depends on those around him for their insensible influence on his character." Thornton counters that, even if this is true, influence best occurs indirectly, through example, "without a thought of how [one's] actions were to make this man industrious, that man saving." Both their perspectives are vindicated, as Thornton does become more humbly dependent, but is arguably more responsive to Margaret's actions (especially her defense of him at the millyard) and his personal interactions with Higgins than to argument alone. But Thornton is just one of Gaskell's examples of the variety of ways that personal connections, and even crises, can refine people's character throughout their lives.

EDUCATION

Education occupies an important role in *North and South*. The Hales would not have left their native Helstone if Mr. Hale's studies had not raised religious doubts; if Thornton, the manufacturer, had not desired tutelage to address his educational gaps, then the Hales wouldn't likely have moved to Milton. Yet, throughout the story, tension exists as to the proper role of learning. While some dismiss learning as a self-indulgent distraction, others see its value as determined by its ends. Through this tension, Gaskell argues that learning and education should not be ends in themselves, but should be targeted to the needs of the present day, benefiting learned and unlearned alike.

Some characters disparage learning itself as useless and even harmful. When Margaret and her father call on Mrs. Thornton, the latter expresses skepticism about her son's renewed study

of the classics. "Classics may do very well for men who loiter away their lives in the **country** or in colleges," she pointedly huffs, "but Milton men ought to have their thoughts and powers absorbed in the work of today." With these remarks, she implies that Mr. Hale's background has been self-indulgent, and she elevates "work," not ideas, as relevant for society. Ever loyal to Mrs. Hale, Dixon, the Hales' servant, complains that Mr. Hale should have taken better care of his wife instead of "always reading, reading, thinking, thinking. See what it has brought him to! Many a one who never reads nor thinks either, gets to be Rector, and Dean..." Like Mrs. Thornton, Dixon views learning in instrumental terms; if all Mr. Hale's reading did not advance his career, she thinks, then it served no purpose, and even caused harm to his dependents.

Most characters, however, see a valid place for learning, but argue that it's misused when it is wrongly deployed, or insufficiently married to action. When Higgins recalls his former employer, Hamper, rudely recommending a book of economic theory to him as a way of silencing Higgins' complaints, Mr. Hale suggests that, regardless of the attitude with which it was offered, the book would nevertheless have told Higgins the truth. Higgins responds that, regardless of its truthfulness, the book is gibberish to him if it's in a form he's unable to receive: "I'm not one who [thinks] truth can be shaped out in words, all neat and clean, as th' men at th' foundry cut out sheet-iron … Folk who sets up to doctor th' world wi' their truth, [must] suit different for different minds." In Higgins's view, theoretical learning may have its place. Unless it is expressed in a way that's accessible to its intended recipients, however, it might as well be a foreign language.

When Mr. Hale's Oxford friend, Mr. Bell, visits Milton, Thornton and Bell argue about the relevance of study. Unlike the ancient Greeks, Thornton argues, "we do not look upon life as a time for enjoyment, but as a time for action and exertion … It is fine when the study of the past leads to a prophecy of the future. But to men groping in new circumstances, it would be finer if the words of experience could direct us how to act in what concerns us most intimately and immediately…" Unlike his mother, Thornton sees value in classical study, or else he would not have hired Mr. Hale to help him fill the gaps in his education. However, he disagrees with the scholarly Bell that the past should be studied for its own sake. Study is not something to be enjoyed at leisure, in his view; it must rather be pressed into service in grappling with the concerns of the day.

After Mr. Hale's death, Henry Lennox muses to Bell that there had been no need for Hale to give up his position as Helstone rector. "These country clergymen live such isolated lives," he claims, "that they are very apt to disturb themselves with imaginary doubts as to the articles of faith, and throw up certain opportunities of doing good for very uncertain fancies of their own." His remarks are haughtily dismissive of Hale's crisis of conscience, as well as the good done by the Hales in Milton. However, his attitude is in keeping with Gaskell's point that isolated study can become detached from daily realities, failing to serve those who might benefit from it.

When she visits Helstone at the end of the story, even Margaret concludes that Mr. Hale's old study in the rectory "had conduced … to the formation of a character more fitted for thought than action." But Hepworth, Hale's less bookish successor, is portrayed ambivalently as well. "Even during the composition of his most orthodox sermons," the rector watched out his newly-built window so that he might "[sally] out after his parishioners, who had need of quick legs if they could take refuge in the 'Jolly Forester' before the teetotal Vicar had arrested them." If anything, Gaskell suggests, the proactive Hepworth could stand to cultivate more of his predecessor's meditative frame. Gaskell upholds the value of thought and learning, but they must always be anchored to the needs of everyday life, answerable to human beings.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

SMOKE, FOG, AND GRAY

Particularly in the early chapters of *North and South*, **smoke**, fog, and the associated color gray symbolize industry's overwhelming presence in the North, as well as the adverse impact industry can have on human flourishing. When the Hales arrive in the seaside town of Heston en route to Milton, they immediately notice that "the colors looked grayer—more enduring, not so gay and pretty," a description which is associated with the townsfolks' utilitarian clothing and ceaseless busywork in their shops. People's lives appear less vibrant and more consumed with work than in the South.

Miles before reaching Milton for the first time, Margaret and Mr. Hale see "a deep lead-colored cloud" hanging over the city in the distance, and they soon notice "a faint taste and smell of smoke"—an experience that engulfs their senses long before they see the dull, unvarying rows of houses and dodge cotton-laden lorries in the streets. Industry is inescapable, even if one doesn't work in a mill. Likewise, as the Hales settle into their Milton home, "a thick fog crept up to the very windows, and was driven into every open door in choking white wreaths of unwholesome mist." Dixon predicts the fog will be the death of Mrs. Hale before long. Indeed, Dixon's prediction turns out to be true; Mrs. Hale's health soon suffers, in part because of heavier domestic responsibilities, but largely because "the air itself was so different, deprived of all revivifying principle" compared to Helstone. The change in their lives has been too devastating for Mrs. Hale to recover from, and none of them

can escape the encroachment of industry physically, psychologically, or in their relationships.

NATURE AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

Though most of *North and South* takes place in an industrial city, nature and country life symbolize refreshment and are often associated with Margaret Hale herself. When Margaret first returns to Helstone from London, she initially feels perfectly at home in "her" forest—its "full, dusky green" filled with "wild, free, living creatures." When Margaret is removed from this environment, she pines for it, and her memories of it provide solace both to her and others. When Margaret visits the ailing Bessy Higgins, for example, Bessy longs to hear about the country, and homesick Margaret pours forth remembrances of "the deep shade of rest even at noonday…billowy ferns…long streaks of golden sunlight," soothing Bessy. After a later visit, Bessy, who's dying of an industrial lung disease, reflects that Margaret is "like a breath of country air, somehow. She freshens me up."

After Margaret rejects Thornton's proposal of marriage, a dazed Thornton catches a passing omnibus (carriage), which carries him to a small country town outside Milton, where he wanders the fields. Though he is tormented, Thornton is only able to come to grips with his feelings for Margaret within the peace of nature, distant from his everyday industrial habitat. This is the only time the rural outskirts of Milton feature in the story. While Gaskell argues that no environment is perfect—as Margaret herself learns when she visits Helstone at the end of the novel—nature provides space for people to breathe, literally and figuratively.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *North and South* published in 1996.

Chapter 1 Quotes

"Oh, [Helstone is] only a hamlet…There is the church and a few houses near it on the green—cottages, rather—with roses growing all over them."

"And flowering all the year round, especially at Christmas—make your picture complete," said he.

"No," replied Margaret, somewhat annoyed, "I am not making a picture. I am trying to describe Helstone as it really is. You should not have said that."

"I am penitent," he answered. "Only it really sounded like a village in a tale rather than in real life."

"And so it is," replied Margaret, eagerly. "…Helstone is like a village in a poem—in one of Tennyson's poems."

Related Characters: Henry Lennox, Margaret Hale (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of *North and South*, Margaret lives in London with her Aunt Shaw and cousin Edith, having moved there as a young girl. Her friend Henry, Edith's soon-to-be brother-in-law, has just asked her to describe Helstone, the village where Margaret was born. Henry's flippant teasing—charging her with romanticizing Helstone—annoys Margaret. Nearly in the same breath, however, she acknowledges that Helstone really *is* like a fictional village, even associating it with the poetry of Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Britain's Poet Laureate from 1850–1892, Tennyson was arguably the most popular contemporary poet at the time of the story. Among Tennyson's themes were sentimental, though hardly simplistic, portrayals of nature and rural English life. So Margaret's defensiveness—that she is not "making a picture"—is amusing, but it also points to her complicated relationship with her birthplace; she identifies with it strongly, yet her "picture" of life there is idealized and thus incomplete.

Chapter 2 Quotes

"Gormans," said Margaret. "Are those the Gormans who made their fortunes in trade at Southampton? Oh! I'm glad we don't visit them. I don't like shoppy people. I think we are far better off knowing only cottagers and labourers, and people without pretence…I'm sure you don't want me to admire butchers and bakers, and candlestick-makers, do you, mamma?"

Related Characters: Margaret Hale (speaker), Mrs. Maria Hale

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

Having recently returned to Helstone to live with her parents, Margaret is stuck indoors during the autumn rainy season. She and her mother are discussing the fact that there's a shortage of neighbors "of their own standard of cultivation" for them to visit socially. Margaret expresses

disgust at the notion of associating with a family engaged in trade. In the nineteenth century, trade wasn't viewed as a gentlemanly pursuit; people who accumulated wealth by means of trade were looked upon as grasping nobodies, not fitting in to England's traditional class structure. This explains Margaret's (romanticized) preference for land-based occupations, which were seen as humbler and more honest. Her view of "shoppy people" will be challenged within mere weeks of these remarks; once the Hales move to Milton, they won't be able to escape such acquaintances.

Chapter 4 Quotes

"Doubts, papa! Doubts as to religion?" asked Margaret, more shocked than ever.

"No! not doubts as to religion; not the slightest injury to that…You could not understand it all, if I told you—my anxiety, for years past, to know whether I had any right to hold my living—my efforts to quench my smoldering doubts by the authority of the Church. Oh! Margaret, how I love the holy Church from which I am to be shut out!" He could not go on for a moment or two. Margaret could not tell what to say; it seemed to her as terribly mysterious as if her father were about to turn Mahometan.

Related Characters: Mr. Richard Hale, Margaret Hale (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Within a few months of her return to Helstone, Margaret learns the source of her father's continual preoccupation and gloom—he confides in her that he must resign his living (a ministerial post attached to a particular location, with a fixed income), because he can no longer affirm certain doctrines. Anglican clergymen would have been required to uphold the Thirty-Nine Articles, a sixteenth-century document outlining Church of England teachings. As a lifelong Unitarian, Gaskell herself dissented from mainstream Christian doctrines such as the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, so perhaps she imagined Mr. Hale's "smoldering doubts" being of a similar nature, though she never makes this explicit in the story. In any case, Margaret's orthodox upbringing would not have prepared her to take her father's change of opinion in stride—thus her feeling that Mr. Hale might as well have converted to an entirely different religion, such as Islam, rather than simply adopted "Dissenting" points of view.

Chapter 10 Quotes

"It is one of the great beauties of our system, that a working-man may raise himself into the power and position of a master by his own exertions and behavior; that, in fact, every one who rules himself to decency and sobriety of conduct, and attention to his duties, comes over to our ranks; it may not be always as a master, but as an overlooker, a cashier, a book-keeper, a clerk, one on the side of authority and order."

"You consider all who are unsuccessful in raising themselves in the world, from whatever cause, as your enemies, then, if I understand you rightly," said Margaret in a clear, cold voice.

"As their own enemies, certainly," said he…

Related Characters: Margaret Hale, John Thornton (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

Thornton has been invited to tea at the Hales' home, and the conversation has turned to the industrial manufacturing system. Margaret has been drawn into the discussion, making it the first of several debates she and Thornton have on the relationship between the classes. Thornton has just described that relationship in terms of a "battle," indicating his antagonistic conception of masters versus workers. He also implies, by putting himself on the side of "authority and order," that the working class is on the side of subservience and disorder. This quote sets up Thornton's discussion of his own past, when he raised himself from the position of a shop assistant to a master of industry through hard work and self-denial. It also points to Thornton's recurring blind spot—his assumption that everyone has the same opportunities and strength of character that he does, and thus can be blamed for not achieving what he has. The conversation establishes Margaret's remarkable willingness to speak frankly to Thornton, even on subjects that would be considered to be outside of the traditional feminine sphere.

Chapter 11 Quotes

"…[P]oor old wench,—I'm loth to vex thee, I am; but a man mun speak out for the truth, and when I see the world going all wrong at this time o' day, bothering itself wi' things it knows nought about, and leaving undone all the things that lie in disorder close at its hand—why, I say, leave a' this talk about religion alone, and set to work on what yo' see and know. That's my creed. It's simple, and not far to fetch, nor hard to work."

Related Characters: Nicholas Higgins (speaker), Margaret Hale, Bessy Higgins

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

Margaret is visiting the Higgins' home for the first time, having met millworker Nicholas and his daughter, Bessy, in the streets of Milton. The dying Bessy and Margaret have just been speaking of Bessy's yearning for heaven, and Bessy's father has expressed impatience with this kind of talk. He argues that "Methodist fancies" like Bessy's (a catch-all term for popular religious piety, not just Methodism) distract people from dealing with immediate problems. He maintains that his "creed" of paying attention to what a person sees and knows for certain isn't hard to understand or to carry out. Higgins represents a different brand of religious doubt than Mr. Hale, based on a perceived contradiction between faith and experience, rather than questioning specific tenets based on academic study. Higgins' preference for action over speculation, as well as his critique of an overemphasis on heaven, might also hint at Gaskell's Unitarian outlook.

Chapter 14 Quotes

"I think, Margaret," she continued, after a pause, in a weak, trembling, exhausted voice, "I am glad of it—I am prouder of Frederick standing up against injustice, than if he had been simply a good officer."

"I am sure I am," said Margaret, in a firm, decided tone. "Loyalty and obedience to wisdom and justice are fine; but it is still finer to defy arbitrary power, unjustly and cruelly used—not on behalf of ourselves, but on behalf of others more helpless."

Related Characters: Margaret Hale, Mrs. Maria Hale (speaker), Frederick Hale

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

After Mrs. Hale becomes seriously ill in Milton's smoky environment, she yearns to see her firstborn, Frederick, one last time. Until this point in the book, the circumstances of Frederick's exile from England have been murky, but in this scene, Margaret draws the full story out of her mother. She learns that Frederick, a Navy sailor, helped lead a mutiny after a man died as a result of their captain's tyrannical demands. Though Frederick's actions have come at a tremendous cost to his family—a visit to England risks capture and likely death for him—Mrs. Hale is ultimately grateful for what he's done. Moreover, Frederick's actions help shape Margaret's thinking about injustice; in the riot at Marlborough Mills, she makes her own stand against injustice on behalf of Thornton, whose sex (Margaret thinks) actually renders him more vulnerable to mob violence. This conversation also shows the development in Mrs. Hale's and Margaret's relationship—since Margaret becomes more of a confidant to her mother during Mrs. Hale's final illness—and it reveals greater seriousness in Mrs. Hale's character than Gaskell showed during the Helstone chapters, when she was often in a flutter over minor problems.

Chapter 15 Quotes

"If you live in Milton, you must learn to have a brave heart, Miss Hale."

"I would do my best," said Margaret rather pale. "I do not know whether I am brave or not till I am tried; but I am afraid I should be a coward."

"South country people are often frightened by what our Darkshire men and women call only living and struggling. But when you've been ten years among a people who are always owing their betters a grudge, and only waiting for an opportunity to pay it off, you'll know whether you are a coward or not; take my word for it."

Related Characters: Margaret Hale, Mrs. Thornton (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

Margaret is having tea at the Thorntons' house, and Mrs. Thornton has described the relationship between masters and workers in starkly antagonistic terms. She even describes a previous strike when she needed to convey a message through angry crowds ("it needed to be a woman") and ended up marooned on the factory roof. This quote introduces a comparison of the two women, as Margaret later takes a stand before rioting crowds herself, trusting that her sex will protect her from violence. The difference between the two is that, during the Marlborough Mills riot,

Margaret urges Thornton to face the crowds "man to man" in order to overcome the perpetual antagonism, whereas Mrs. Thornton continues to stoke that antagonism. Contrary to Mrs. Thornton's prejudice against women from the South, Margaret indeed proves to have "a brave heart," and unlike Mrs. Thornton, it leads her to step outside the safety of her accustomed circles.

"Given a strong feeling of independence in every Darkshire man, have I any right to obtrude my views, of the manner in which he shall act, upon another…merely because he has labor to sell, and I capital to buy?"

"Not in the least," said Margaret, determined just to say this one thing; "not in the least because of your labor and capital positions, whatever they are, but because you are a man, dealing with a set of men over whom you have, whether you reject the use of it or not, immense power; just because your lives and your welfare are so constantly and intimately interwoven. God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent. We may ignore our own dependence, or refuse to acknowledge that others depend upon us in more respects than the payment of weekly wages; but the thing must be, nevertheless."

Related Characters: Margaret Hale, John Thornton (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis

Later, on the same day that the Hales had tea with Mrs. Thornton, Thornton stops by the Hales' house, and they fall into a conversation about the impending strike. Thornton objects to a parental model for his interactions with his workers outside of business hours, arguing that he has no claim on their lives or their moral development when they are not working. Here, he attributes this attitude to his Northern character. However, Margaret argues that his outlook is actually born of an unchristian suspicion between the two groups; by virtue of their common humanity, Thornton has a responsibility to care for their welfare. Margaret's "mutual dependence" argument gradually takes hold of Thornton's imagination, as he eventually partners with Higgins to start a workers' dining room, and even recasts his business model so as to involve workers in the formation of his plans. Thus, this very conversation lays the groundwork for mutual influence between Thornton and Margaret.

Chapter 19 Quotes

"Yo' know well, that a worser tyrant than e'er th' masters were says. 'Clem to death, and see 'em a' clem to death, ere yo' dare go again th' Union.' Yo' know it well, Nicholas, for a' yo're one on 'em. Yo' may be kind hearts, each separate; but once banded together, yo've no more pity for a man than a wild hunger-maddened wolf."

Related Characters: John Boucher (speaker), Nicholas Higgins

Related Themes:

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

Boucher, Higgins's neighbor, speaks these words the first time Margaret encounters him in the Higgins home. Boucher is an unskilled worker and the father of many children, and in this scene, he is enraged over what he sees as the union's cruelty in striking and denying him the chance to work. Despite Higgins's assurances, Boucher is convinced that his family will starve, and he risks ostracism from his fellow laborers by seeking work at a mill that's hostile to unions. Eventually, he kills himself in despair. Boucher's plight gives Margaret yet another perspective on relations between and within classes. She comes to believe that unions, like masters of industry, can crush the individual in pursuit of abstract goals. Higgins eventually shares Margaret's view, taking responsibility for the feeding and schooling of the Boucher children after his death. However, the question of unions' "tyrannical" potential is not decisively addressed by the end of the book.

Chapter 22 Quotes

"Mr. Thornton," said Margaret, shaking all over with her passion, "go down and face them like a man. Save these poor strangers, whom you have decoyed here. Speak to your workmen as if they were human beings. Speak to them kindly. Don't let the soldiers come in and cut down poor creatures who are driven mad. I see one there who is. If you have any courage or noble quality in you, go out and speak to them, man to man."

Related Characters: Margaret Hale (speaker), John Boucher, John Thornton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

At the novel's climax, Margaret visits the Thornton house and quickly finds herself swept up in a riot. Thornton has hired strikebreakers (colloquially known as "knobsticks" in Milton) from Ireland to keep work going during the strike, a controversial practice that often stoked class tensions and sparked violence in industrial cities. Although the union has demanded that the strikers show respect for law and order, an angry subset, including John Boucher, now marches toward Marlborough Mills and tries to batter down the gate. Looking down from the Thorntons' window, Margaret sees the despair in men's faces and fears for the cowering strikebreakers ("these poor strangers"), so she begs Thornton to try to deescalate the situation by addressing the crowd. Though Thornton speaks of them as "wild beasts," Margaret sees them as "poor creatures who are driven mad," pressed by hunger and desperation to act as they normally wouldn't. While Margaret does have a naïve perspective on the situation—as will shortly become obvious—it's in keeping with her earlier insistence that face-to-face communication is the only hope of reconciliation between classes.

If she thought her sex would be a protection,—if, with shrinking eyes she had turned away from the terrible anger of these men, in any hope that ere she looked again they would have paused and reflected, and slunk away, and vanished, she was wrong. Their reckless passion had carried them too far to stop—at least had carried some of them too far; for it is always the savage lads, with their love of cruel excitement, who head the riot—reckless to what bloodshed it may lead…

"For God's sake! Do not damage your cause by this violence. You do not know what you are doing."

Related Characters: Margaret Hale (speaker), John Thornton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

After Thornton goes down to speak to the rioters at Marlborough Mills, Margaret, watching from the window, notices that some young boys are preparing to throw their heavy wooden shoes at him. Instantly, she rushes downstairs and warns the crowd that soldiers are on their way. When Thornton refuses to back down from using strikebreakers, the crowd's anger spills over; Margaret "only [thinks] how she could save" Thornton and throws her body against him as a shield. Margaret's rationale is that it's considered taboo to harm a woman—giving her a special prerogative to resist violence. While this does seem to have been common cultural knowledge and not just a class-based assumption (Mrs. Thornton describes having used the same reasoning when she once carried a message through an angry mob), it fails Margaret in this instance; she's injured by a pebble a moment later. Though Margaret defends the crowds as desperate, the narrator suggests that some rioters, at least, take cruel enjoyment in what they're doing. In either case, this moment is a turning-point for Thornton and Margaret, as Margaret's act brings Thornton's love for her to the forefront.

Chapter 28 Quotes

"As I was a-saying, sir, I reckon yo'd not ha' much belief in yo' if yo' lived here,—if you'd been bred here. I ax your pardon if I use wrong words; but what I mean by belief just now, is a-thinking on sayings and maxims and promises made by folk yo' never saw, about the things and the life yo' never saw, nor no one else…There's many and many a one wiser, and scores better learned than I am around me,—folk who've had time to think on these things,—while my time has had to be gi'en up to getting my bread."

Related Characters: Nicholas Higgins (speaker), Margaret Hale, Mr. Richard Hale

Related Themes:

Page Number: 222

Explanation and Analysis

After Bessy Higgins's death, Margaret intervenes to prevent Nicholas Higgins from drinking away his grief by inviting him to have tea with Mr. Hale. Though Margaret's father is briefly dismayed by the expectation that he visit with "a drunken infidel weaver," he quickly rises to the occasion, and his kindness draws out Higgins' courtesy in turn. Their conversation drifts to religion, and Higgins offers an articulate defense of his lack of religious allegiance. He explains that most people in Milton are much too occupied with daily survival to bother with questions about things that can't fill their bellies. Essentially, their capacity for religious faith is ground out of them by the circumstances of daily living. Higgins's own daughter Bessy, of course, seems to be an exception to this. "Promises made by folk [she] never saw" sustained Bessy through illness and helped her

make sense of her suffering. Higgins doesn't explain why Bessy was different, but he seems to regard her belief as having been a source of comfort and amusement, rather than a matter for intellectual assent, like the creedal adherence demanded by the church. Despite his suspicions of organized religion, however, Gaskell uses this conversation to show that Higgins is no "infidel," but a man of integrity who happens to be spiritually homeless.

Chapter 29 Quotes

"But, Margaret, don't get to use these horrid Milton words. 'Slack of work:' it is a provincialism. What will your aunt Shaw say, if she hears you use it on her return?"

"Oh, mamma! Don't try and make a bugbear out of aunt Shaw," said Margaret, laughing. "Edith picked up all sorts of military slang from Captain Lennox, and aunt Shaw never took any notice of it."

"But yours is factory slang."

"And if I live in a factory town, I must speak factory language when I want it."

Related Characters: Margaret Hale, Mrs. Maria Hale (speaker), Captain Lennox, Edith Shaw, Aunt Shaw

Related Themes:

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

While Margaret and her mother chat one day, Mrs. Hale is alarmed to hear Margaret using Northern slang. This exchange shows that Margaret has assimilated to Milton's working-class environment to a degree that her mother was never likely to match, even if Mrs. Hale had not been housebound from illness. Margaret goes on to make a defense of the use of "provincial" language on two counts; one, that it's culturally appropriate (she adds that she used local slang all the time when they lived in the New Forest); two, that it's often more expressive and concise than the explanatory sentences she would have to use otherwise. Mrs. Hale is not convinced, arguing that Edith's military slang—associated with a more professional class—is acceptable, while "factory" slang is unbecoming. Mrs. Hale's disapproval shows that dialects are often class markers even more than they are markers of regional identity. Margaret's appropriation of slang echoes Gaskell's own interest in English dialects, evident in *North and South* and other works, like her earlier *Mary Barton*, set in Manchester.

Chapter 37 Quotes

"North an' South have each getten their own troubles. If work's sure and steady theer, labor's paid at starvation prices; while here we'n rucks o' money coming in one quarter, and ne'er a farthing th' next. For sure, th' world is in a confusion that passes me or any other man to understand; it needs fettling, and who's to fettle it, if it's as yon folks say, and there's nought but what we see?"

Related Characters: Nicholas Higgins (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 300

Explanation and Analysis

Soon after John Boucher's suicide, a guilt-stricken Higgins assumes responsibility for Boucher's orphaned children and accordingly swallows his pride to seek work wherever he can find it. He even asks the Hales if they can help him secure a job in the South, since they've spoken so highly of the people's kindness and the favorable cost of living. They quickly dissuade Higgins from this notion, explaining that Southern agricultural life inclines to its own kind of stagnation, which the hot-blooded Higgins couldn't endure. In addition, Northern working-class people are accustomed to eating meat on a daily basis, which the Southern poor can't afford. The conversation makes Higgins realize the inevitable trade-offs when putting down roots in any place. The conversation also shows development in Higgins's character (his generosity and determination) and Margaret's and her father's realism about the South, a contrast to Margaret's earlier pro-South prejudice. It's also a reminder that the effects of the Industrial Revolution weren't felt equally in every part of England, and that class norms were still in flux at the time of Gaskell's writing.

Chapter 38 Quotes

"At first, when I heard from one of my servants, that you had been seen walking about with a gentleman, so far from home as the Outwood station, at such a time of the evening, I could hardly believe it...It was indiscreet, to say the least; many a young woman has lost her character before now—"

Margaret's eyes flashed fire. This was a new idea—this was too insulting. If Mrs. Thornton had spoken to her about the lie she had told, well and good—she would have owned it, and humiliated herself. But to interfere with her conduct—to speak of her character! She—Mrs. Thornton, a mere stranger—it was too impertinent! She would not answer her—not one word. Mrs. Thornton saw the battle-spirit in Margaret's eyes, and it called up her combativeness also."

Related Characters: Mrs. Thornton (speaker), Frederick Hale, Margaret Hale

Related Themes:

Page Number: 308

Explanation and Analysis

When Mrs. Hale becomes ill, she requests that Mrs. Thornton, her only female acquaintance in Milton, look out for Margaret after Mrs. Hale dies. Mrs. Thornton, already disdainful of the Hales and their proud daughter, reluctantly accepts. After the incident between Leonards and Frederick Hale at the train station, Mrs. Thornton hears about Margaret's alleged presence there with her "lover" (actually Margaret's brother, Frederick) and eagerly seizes upon the excuse to scold her for the "indiscretion" of appearing in public with a young man late at night. Here, Mrs. Thornton raises Margaret's rage by casting doubt on her character. Margaret, tortured by the unnecessary lie she'd told to protect Frederick, had not expected the conversation with Mrs. Thornton to go in this direction and knows that Mrs. Hale would never have intended it, either. She is not intimidated by Mrs. Thornton and soon excuses herself with the "grace of an offended princess," and even Mrs. Thornton can't help respecting Margaret's resolve. This conversation goes to show just how fragile a woman's reputation could be in Victorian society; the flip-side of Margaret's courage and independence was the risk of "lost character" on a pretext as flimsy as this one.

Chapter 39 Quotes

"Oh, how unhappy this last year has been! I have passed out of childhood into old age. I have had no youth—no womanhood; the hopes of womanhood have closed for me—for I shall never marry; and I anticipate cares and sorrows just as if I were an old woman, and with the same fearful spirit. I am weary of this continual call upon me for strength."

Related Characters: Margaret Hale (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 315

Explanation and Analysis

After Mrs. Thornton's confrontation of Margaret for her supposed "indiscretion," Margaret retreats to her room to think over all that's happened. She finds that her grief for her mother, her support of her father, and even Mrs. Thornton's rudeness are all bearable; but she's in anguish over the fact that Thornton, too, probably assumes that Frederick was her lover, and that she has something to hide about her relationship with him. She can't figure out why the possibility of losing Thornton's respect distresses her so much, but she refuses to inquire too closely into her own feelings. Overall, the weight of Margaret's cares has been overwhelming, and while her hopelessness sounds melodramatic, it realistically conveys the strain she's been under; she is repeatedly asked to carry others' sorrows, solve others' problems, and even take thought for her own reputation, all with virtually no outlet for her unhappiness. By showing the reader Margaret's shaky state of mind, Gaskell undercuts the ideal of the stoic heroine who shoulders others' burdens without complaint.

"Yo've called me impudent, and a liar, and a mischief-maker, and yo' might ha' said wi' some truth, as I were now and then given to drink. An' I ha' called you a tyrant, an' an oud bull-dog, and a hard, cruel master; that's where it stands. But for th' childer. Measter, do yo' think we can e'er get on together?"

"Well!" said Mr. Thornton, half-laughing, "it was not my proposal that we should go together. But there's one comfort, on your own showing. We neither of us can think much worse of the other than we do now."

Related Characters: John Thornton, Nicholas Higgins (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 319

Explanation and Analysis

On Margaret's urging, Higgins approaches Thornton to ask for a job, but he is rudely rejected at first. However, Thornton realizes that Higgins waited five hours for a chance to speak with him, and upon inquiring, he learns that Higgins's plans to care for the Boucher children are legitimate. Thornton comes to apologize to Higgins in person and invites him to work at Marlborough Mills. The above exchange captures the shift in the relational dynamic between the two men. Though they transparently dislike each other, each has gone out of his way to humble himself before the other, and they're both willing to be proven wrong about their worst assumptions. This is the first step in what will become a positive working relationship, if not to say friendship, between Higgins and Thornton. The quote also vindicates Margaret's claim that, if only people of

differing classes make an effort to understand one another's point of view, the impasse between them *is* surmountable.

Chapter 40 Quotes

"If we do not reverence the past as you do in Oxford, it is because we want something which can apply to the present more directly. It is fine when the study of the past leads to a prophecy of the future. But to men groping in new circumstances, it would be finer if the words of experience [from history] could direct us how to act in what concerns us most intimately and immediately; which is full of difficulties that must be encountered; and upon the mode in which they are met and conquered—not merely pushed aside for the time—depends our future. Out of the wisdom of the past, help us over the present. But no! People can speak of Utopia much more easily than of the next day's duty; and yet when that duty is all done by others, who so ready to cry, 'Fie, for shame!'"

Related Characters: John Thornton (speaker), Mr. Bell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 327

Explanation and Analysis

When Mr. Hale's friend and Thornton's landlord, Mr. Bell, comes to visit from Oxford, Thornton gets drawn into a debate with him about the appropriate role of education. Though Mr. Bell has a jesting attitude about the whole exchange—teasing Thornton that Milton manufacturers are Thor-worshippers—Thornton takes the entire discussion in grave earnest. He argues that history ought to be studied not out of veneration for the past, but in order to find direct applications to the present. He also complains that many people long for progress, but then criticize those who actually make efforts to bring it about. In addition to highlighting Thornton's preference for marrying thought with action, this conversation is also good example of differing mindsets between the industrial North and the Southern leisured class. Interestingly, it also suggests that Thornton has internalized Margaret's view that greater cooperation between classes is necessary to everyone's flourishing.

Chapter 41 Quotes

When her father had driven off on his way to the railroad, Margaret felt how great and long had been the pressure on her time and her spirits. It was astonishing, almost stunning, to feel herself so much at liberty; no one depending on her for cheering care, if not for positive happiness; no invalid to plan and think for; she might be idle, and silent, and forgetful,—and what seemed worth more than all the other privileges—she might be unhappy if she liked.

Related Characters: Mr. Richard Hale, Margaret Hale

Related Themes:

Page Number: 336

Explanation and Analysis

After Mr. Hale goes to pay Mr. Bell a visit in Oxford, Margaret at last earns a break from the past year's heavy responsibilities. The reader gets an almost tangible feeling of relief from Margaret's sudden, unaccustomed liberty; it's a realistic portrayal of the strain of constant caregiving. Over the past year, she has nursed and mourned her mother; comforted her father and helped him manage his own emotional burdens; borne the anxiety of Frederick's risky visit and flight; and cared for the needs of others, like Bessy and the Bouchers, as well. In all of this, Margaret has never completely indulged her own emotions, always sacrificing them in order to serve others. In one way, Gaskell does uphold the Victorian ideal of the strong woman as a ministering angel within the household; notably, though, she also portrays the shadow side of this arrangement. Of course, harder things are yet to come for Margaret, as Mr. Hale dies while in Oxford, and she must pick up the pieces of her life.

Chapter 44 Quotes

Then her thoughts went back to Milton, with a strange sense of the contrast between the life there, and here. She was getting surfeited of the eventless ease in which no struggle or endeavor was required. She was afraid lest she should even become sleepily deadened into forgetfulness of anything beyond the life which was lapping her round with luxury. There might be toilers and moilers there in London, but she never saw them; the very servants lived in an underground world of their own, of which she knew neither the hopes nor the fears...There was a strange unfinished vacuum in Margaret's heart and mode of life.

Related Characters: Margaret Hale

Related Themes:

Page Number: 364

Explanation and Analysis

Following Mr. Hale's death, Margaret returns to London to live with her relatives. After all she's experienced in Milton, there's a sense that London life has not changed whatsoever, while Margaret is very different. This hearkens back to Mrs. Thornton's claim, when Margaret was a newcomer to Milton, that the typical Southerner is "frightened by what our Darkshire men and women only call living and struggling." Now that Margaret has come to take struggle for granted, its absence is disorienting. Her biggest fear is not struggle, in fact, but insensitivity to struggle in the world around her. The invisibility of London's working class is also striking to her, after becoming used to interacting with people outside her social sphere more regularly. The "unfinished vacuum" in Margaret's life makes her realize that, no longer having a family to care for and (she thinks) no prospect of marriage, she must find new goals toward which to orient her finely-honed strength.

"But the truth is, these country clergymen live such isolated lives—isolated, I mean, from all intercourse with men of equal cultivation with themselves, by whose minds they might regulate their own, and discover when they were going either too fast or too slow—that they are very apt to disturb themselves with imaginary doubts as to the articles of faith, and throw up certain opportunities of doing good for very uncertain fancies of their own."

After visiting with Margaret in London, Henry and Mr. Bell chat about the struggles the Hale family has endured in recent years. Henry remarks that he's heard from Mr. Hale's successor, Hepworth, that Hale need not have abandoned his position as rector over a few nagging doubts. Henry argues that "country clergymen" become so morbidly consumed by their own ideas that they make mountains out of theological molehills, and overreact about small things. They have no neighbors of similar education, so they have few opportunities to test and refine their thinking against others. The result is that they become disproportionately fixated on certain pet ideas and sometimes do what Mr. Hale did, walking away from a potentially fruitful ministry for no good reason. While Mr. Hale himself had warned of the risk of stagnation in country life, Henry's claim is presumptuous—assuming that Hale's doubts were insignificant, and that his heartbreaking choice to leave Helstone need not have been made. It also lines up with the bias, seen elsewhere in the novel, that concrete, measurable action is to be preferred to thought.

Related Characters: Henry Lennox (speaker), Mr. Hepworth, Mr. Richard Hale, Mr. Bell

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 371

Chapter 46 Quotes

"After all it is right," said she, hearing the voices of children at play while she was dressing. "If the world stood still, it would retrograde and become corrupt, if that is not Irish. Looking out of myself, and my own painful sense of change, the progress all around me is right and necessary. I must not think so much of how circumstances affect me myself, but how they affect others, if I wish to have a right judgment, or a hopeful trustful heart." And with a smile ready in her eyes to quiver down to her lips, she went into the parlour and greeted Mr. Bell.

Related Characters: Margaret Hale (speaker), Mr. Bell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 390

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is spoken by Margaret on her final morning in Helstone, which she is visiting for the last time with Mr. Bell. She has found the visit rather upsetting—many of her favorite places and people are altered, or vanished altogether. In short, Helstone is far from the idyllic haven she'd cherished early in the story and pined for from Milton. However, Margaret reflects on the ways she herself has changed and realizes it's foolish to expect the world to stand still for her. Being stuck in her own regrets blinds her to positive developments that benefit others. This breakthrough enables Margaret to leave Helstone on a positive note, stirring her affection for the place once again. This also accords with Margaret's personal development throughout the story; considering the welfare of others often helps her to avoid obsessing too sadly over her own losses. Her use of the word "Irish" as a pejorative, meaning "superstitious," suggests her own cultural prejudice.

Chapter 51 Quotes

"I have arrived at the conviction that no mere institutions, however wise…can attach class to class as they should be attached, unless the working out of such institutions bring the individuals of the different classes into actual personal contact. Such intercourse is the very breath of life…I would take an idea, the working out of which would necessitate personal intercourse; it might not go well at first, but at every hitch interest would be felt by an increasing number of men, and at last its success in working come to be desired by all, as all had borne a part in the formation of the plan; and even then I am sure that it would lose its vitality, cease to be living, as soon as it was no longer carried on by that sort of common interest which invariably makes people find means and ways of seeing each other, and becoming acquainted with each other's characters and persons…We should understand each other better, and I'll venture to say we should like each other more."

Related Characters: John Thornton (speaker), Mr. Colthurst, Margaret Hale

Related Themes:

Page Number: 421

Explanation and Analysis

After the failure of Marlborough Mills, Thornton finds himself at a dinner party at the Lennoxes' house in London. It's the first time he and Margaret have seen one another since Margaret left Milton. Rather than expressing shame or regret over the collapse of his business, Thornton is filled with enthusiasm over the "experiments" he hopes to pursue in his next venture. This quote summarizes his newfound theory that workers and masters should both be stakeholders in new ideas and work together toward shared success; such cooperation must be based on deeper interpersonal understanding. Though Thornton doesn't acknowledge it publicly, his conviction has been shaped by Margaret's ideas, which in turn led him to make Higgins's acquaintance and involve employees in projects such as the workers' dining room. Margaret is present at the same party, and Thornton's words are meant for her benefit as well. In fact, she is quickly moved to partner with Thornton and invest in his work, bringing their ongoing debate over trade to a happy resolution.

Chapter 52 Quotes

"They are from Helstone, are they not? I know the deep indentations round the leaves. Oh! Have you been there? When were you there?"

"I wanted to see the place where Margaret grew to what she is, even at the worst time of all, when I had no hope of ever calling her mine. I went there on my return from Havre."

"You must give them to me," she said, trying to take them out of his hand with gentle violence.

"Very well. Only you must pay me for them!"

Related Characters: John Thornton (speaker), Margaret Hale

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 425

Explanation and Analysis

Coming near the very end of the novel, this lighthearted exchange shows Margaret and Thornton fully reconciled with one another and joined in mutual affection. Thornton has just showed Margaret the dried roses he has saved in his pocketbook. The fact that he traveled to Helstone, even when he never expected Margaret to love him in return, shows Thornton's deep regard for her and admiration of her character. The continued association of Helstone with Margaret signifies that, even though Margaret no longer

idealizes her birthplace and has changed since she left it, it nevertheless played a significant role in making Margaret the strong and tender woman Thornton loves. The teasing claim that Margaret must "pay" for the flowers might be a play on the novel's commercial themes and the fact that Margaret now has a stake in Thornton's business. It's likely also a subtle way of letting the reader know that the two kiss, as they enjoy a "time of delicious silence" immediately thereafter.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Margaret Hale is with her cousin, Edith Shaw, in the drawing-room of their home in Harley Street, London. The two have been talking over Edith's impending marriage to Captain Lennox and Margaret's plans to return to her parents' **country** parsonage, after spending the last ten years living with the Shaws. Edith, exhausted from wedding preparations, has fallen asleep.

The novel begins in an indulgent upper-class setting. Margaret's and Edith's concerns seem fairly typical for women of a fashionable London neighborhood in the Victorian era, establishing a contrast with later events.


While Edith naps, Margaret thinks about her upcoming move and listens to her Aunt Shaw, who is entertaining several neighbors in the next room. Aunt Shaw is talking about the age disparity in her own unhappy marriage, which caused her to resolve that Edith should marry for love. As the conversation turns to Edith's trousseau, Aunt Shaw summons Margaret to get Edith's beautiful Indian shawls to show to the visitors. When Margaret goes to the upstairs nursery to fetch the shawls, she remembers how she came, "all untamed from the forest," to join the Shaw household nine years earlier. She recalls the homesick little girl she had been and thinks how much she will miss the place now.

Reminiscence marks the story from the beginning, with Margaret looking back on her idyllic but "untamed" country roots, and how they contrast with her sophisticated London youth. Displacement and nostalgia will continue to shape Margaret's understanding of herself.

Aunt Shaw uses Margaret as a model to show off the exotic shawls, as Margaret stands "quite silent and passive." In the midst of the modeling, Henry Lennox walks in, and Margaret gives him an amused smile, feeling the ludicrousness of the situation. She is pleased that Henry will be spending the evening, since "he liked and disliked pretty nearly the same things that she did."

Margaret's passivity in the conventionally feminine role of a display model stands in comic contrast to the graver and more public roles she will later occupy. There's also a hint of a possible romantic current between herself and Henry.

When Margaret mentions that she looks forward to a rest from wedding activity, Henry remarks that lately Margaret has always "been carried away by a whirlwind of some other person's making." Margaret agrees that it has been a "never-ending commotion about trifles" and describes the simpler wedding she would prefer. She changes the subject when Henry says that "stately simplicity accords well" with Margaret's character.

Margaret has typically been subject to the demands of others, and the trifling nature of the "whirlwind" doesn't seem to suit her. Margaret is also uncomfortable with the fact that Henry seems to have made a study of her character.

Henry asks Margaret to describe the village of Helstone in greater detail, and then teases her about the picturesque image she gives. Margaret is annoyed, saying, "I am not making a picture. I am trying to describe Helstone as it really is," though she soon goes on to say that "Helstone is like a village in a poem—in one of Tennyson's poems."

Though Margaret doesn't want to wax nostalgic, she can't entirely avoid it—undercutting herself by describing a picture-perfect rural scene. This suggests that Helstone retains a mystique for her, after spending much of her youth living at a distance.

Henry is dissatisfied with Margaret's struggle to put Helstone into words and suggests that he might pay her a visit there, which Margaret encourages, then excuses herself to turn pages while Edith plays the piano. Then Captain Lennox arrives, breaking up the party. Henry observes the two girls as they bustle around the tea-table.

Henry's romantic interest in Margaret is obvious, though at this point it's unclear whether Margaret really means to encourage it or not.

CHAPTER 2

After Edith's wedding, Margaret accompanies her father home on the train to Helstone from London. Fresh from goodbyes, Margaret's heart feels surprisingly heavy as she heads home, "the place and the life she had longed for for years." With an effort, she stops dwelling on the past and focuses on the future. As she does so, she notices how careworn her sleeping father looks, his face lined from "habitual distress and depression."

Already, there are hints that Helstone won't fulfill Margaret's lofty expectations—even her memories of her father don't align with present reality, as his haggard appearance suggests he's been carrying unknown burdens.

Margaret assumes that her father's sadness is due to her brother, Frederick. She wishes that Frederick had become a clergyman, "instead of going into the navy, and being lost to us all"—due to circumstances she has never fully understood. Margaret smiles at her father as he wakes up, ready to cheer him with talk of the future.

Though Margaret's assumption later proves to be incorrect, Frederick's mysterious backstory does play a significant role in the family. Also, Margaret already feels a responsibility to be an example of strength and cheer in order to support her father—a role that will soon become habitual for her.

It is late July when Margaret returns to Helstone, and she enjoys getting reacquainted with the beautiful surroundings. In fact, her forest walks "[realize] all Margaret's anticipations," and she takes pride in the place and its people. "Her out-of-doors life was perfect," but she begins to perceive drawbacks within her family life.

Margaret savors the reconnection with her roots that her forest walks afford her, and some of her nostalgia, at least, appears to not be misplaced. However, there is also an undercurrent of discontentment, hinting at things to come.

Mrs. Hale, though kind to Margaret, seems discontented with her lot in Helstone, complaining that the bishop ought to have given Mr. Hale a better living by now and that Helstone is an unhealthy place. Margaret sees that her father shrinks from these remarks. She is unprepared for the air of disrupted peace at home, having forgotten the small details of home that were unpleasant.

The atmosphere at home is one of disharmony. Margaret is not only getting reacquainted with Helstone, but with her parents' characters, discovering that all isn't as she remembered—and that there is more going on than she'd realized.

One day in the fall, when Mrs. Hale complains that there are no cultivated neighbors nearby, Margaret says she is glad that they don't visit the Gormans, a family who have made their fortune in trade. "I don't like shoppy people," she tells her mother; she only likes people "without pretense," whose professions are intellectual, or oriented toward the land. When her mother mildly admonishes her for her fussiness, Margaret says, "I'm sure you don't want me to admire butchers and bakers, and candlestick-makers, do you, mamma?"

Though this exchange is lighthearted, it shows that Margaret has been somewhat isolated within her social class; she only has respect for certain professions and their corresponding lifestyles. Her remarks about "shoppy people" are ironic in light of the people she will socialize with, and even come to admire, later in the story.

Margaret finds the evenings at Helstone hard to occupy, since Mr. Hale withdraws into his library, there aren't many good books for her to read, and Mrs. Hale isn't a very engaging companion. Margaret notices that her father has been even more preoccupied than usual and spends a lot of time watching for the postman. However, Margaret is easily distracted by the "glories of the forest" as the brilliant autumn unfolds.

Family life has its share of dissatisfaction and questions for Margaret, but she still has a youthful ability to distract herself. In her own way, she can satisfy herself with superficial things, even if they're of a different sort from those "trifles" of cousin Edith's.

CHAPTER 3

One October morning, Henry Lennox arrives at Helstone parsonage. Margaret greets him happily, excited to hear news of Edith. While waiting alone in the drawing-room, Henry finds the Hales' place looking "smaller and shabbier than he had expected, as back-ground and frame-work for Margaret, herself so queenly." When Margaret goes to fetch Mrs. Hale, she finds her mother in a fitful mood, so she decides to take Henry out sketching with her until lunchtime.

It's clear that Henry's unexpected visit doesn't please Margaret primarily for romantic reasons. But Henry seems to have matrimony on his mind—hence his interest in Margaret's family circumstances, and the environment that produced such a "queen."

Henry and Margaret set out merrily. They stop to sketch some old cottages. When Margaret goes to speak to one of the old cottage dwellers, Henry sketches them. He tells Margaret, "I hardly dare tell you how much I shall like this sketch," an uncharacteristically blunt admission, to which Margaret makes no response. When the pair returns to the house, they find Mr. Hale, and Margaret sees that his disturbed air has only been set aside, not banished.

Margaret's interest in sketching Helstone accords with her description of it as resembling a Tennyson poem; she sees it as something that can be readily captured in a static form. For Henry, however, Helstone isn't the main attraction, and Margaret either doesn't realize this or is steadfastly ignoring the fact.

When Henry compliments Margaret's drawing, he thinks to himself that "a regular London girl would understand the implied meaning of that speech." But Margaret appears oblivious, just happily accepts the garden roses he has plucked to adorn her dress. The party enjoys an agreeable dinner.

Henry is dropping many hints of his regard for Margaret, and she continues to decline to pick them up. Henry does not seem to be put off by Margaret's apparent naïveté.

After dinner, the family adjourns to the garden to pick pears for dessert. Henry walks through the garden with Margaret, complimenting Helstone's perfections. He warmly tells Margaret that he will never again speak of Helstone as "a mere village in a tale." As they turn a corner in the garden, he begins, "I could almost wish, Margaret—" then stops. Margaret is surprised by the "fluent lawyer's" hesitation, then suddenly perceives what he is about to say. She steels herself for what's coming, knowing she can put a stop to it with "her high maidenly dignity."

Helstone's connection to Margaret has endeared the village to Henry in a way that picturesque descriptions couldn't—or, in any case, Henry knows that praising the village is the way to Margaret's heart. His uncharacteristic fumbling finally clues her in, and though she's not pleased, she knows her own mind and won't let it get too far.

Taking her hand, Henry tells Margaret that he had wished to find her missing London a little more, because he loves her. Margaret extricates her hand and tells him that she didn't know he thought of her in that way, that she thinks of him as a friend, and that she wishes to continue doing so. He asks if there is any hope of her ever thinking of him as a lover, and, after some thought, she tells him no, and asks that they forget the conversation has ever taken place.

Margaret quietly but firmly shoots down Henry's proposal. She hasn't interpreted their friendly interactions in the same light, suggesting that she's been a bit sheltered. Henry's declaration of love, though sudden in Margaret's view, wouldn't be unusual for a marriage proposal in the literature of the time.

Resuming his usual coldness of tone, Henry tells her that, not being given to romance in general, it will take him longer to recover from this mortification— "a struggling barrister to think of matrimony!" Despite her pain, Margaret feels contempt at this speech.

Margaret doesn't relish giving pain to anyone, showing her compassionate nature; but her pride is also evident—Henry's sarcastic reaction reminds her of the ways they differ. A middle-class man generally would have been expected to attain to a certain level of financial stability before marrying, as Henry's muttered comment suggests.

At this point, they rejoin Mr. Hale, who has not yet finished eating the pear he had started. Henry spends the remainder of their visit conversing in a more sarcastic, worldly tone, puzzling Mr. Hale. When he leaves to catch the train, however, his true personality reappears, and he urges Margaret not to despise him.

The reappearance of Mr. Hale, ploddingly eating his pear, adds a touch of comic relief to the scene, and also shows just how much Margaret's world has been rattled within a short time. Henry tries to cover his embarrassment and distance himself from Margaret by behaving in a devil-may-care manner.

CHAPTER 4

After Henry leaves, Margaret sits upstairs thinking over the day, but must rally herself to deal with her mother's petty complaints and her father's abstracted silence during tea. Afterward, she is just resigning herself to another long evening, when Mr. Hale asks her if she can join him in his study to discuss "something very serious to us all." Margaret is startled at first, thinking he is displeased with her refusal of Henry, then realizes he can't possibly know about that. To her surprise, her father suddenly bursts out with, "Margaret! I am going to leave Helstone."

The sudden piling of one shock upon another sets the tone and pace for the novel's action. Margaret has been briefly consumed in her own world, but from now on, she won't often have the luxury of doing that.

When Margaret asks why, Mr. Hale fidgets for another moment, then finally says, "Because I must no longer be a minister in the Church of England." Margaret, who had been expecting her father to say that he had finally been offered a different preferment at last, could not be more shocked by his words or by the look of imploring distress on his face. She asks if it has anything to do with Frederick.

Margaret had envisioned no greater change in her life than a move to another Church of England parish, and the only cause she can imagine for this unforeseen development is her brother's mysterious crisis—the only tragedy she's really known, to this point.

It has nothing to do with Frederick, Mr. Hale explains, and he will answer her questions, but after tonight, they must never speak of his agonizing doubts again. Shocked again, Margaret asks, "Doubts, papa! Doubts as to religion?" "No! not doubts as to religion," he replies, "not the slightest injury to that."

When Mr. Hale says there hasn't been "the slightest injury to [religion]," he means that he is still a Christian believer, implying that there is an intact faith standing above and beyond his doubts. Still, the idea of departing from Anglicanism—the home of his career, and England's official and numerically dominant church for centuries—is shocking enough.

Mr. Hale finally explains that, for years now, he's been harboring "smoldering doubts" that the authority of the Church cannot quench, though he dearly loves the Church from which he is about to be shut out. Margaret finds his words "as terribly mysterious as if her father were about to turn Mahometan."

As a priest of the Church of England, Mr. Hale would be expected to uphold specific theological teachings, but his conscience will no longer allow him to do so, no matter what the Church's authority says. The term "Mahometan"—an archaic term for "Muslim"—shows just how foreign the idea of theological "doubts" is to Margaret; even limited dissent from the church of her upbringing and social circle is as strange as converting to a different religion entirely.

Margaret weeps, as "the one staid foundation of her home, of her idea of her beloved father, seemed reeling and rocking." Mr. Hale tries to comfort her and to strengthen his own resolve by reading her a soliloquy by John Oldfield. He encourages Margaret to think of the early martyrs. But Margaret answers, "The early martyrs suffered for the truth, while you—"

Margaret's view of her father is inseparable from that of a priest. The "Oldfield" Hale quotes was a seventeenth-century clergyman who'd been removed from his position for rejecting Anglican teachings. This suggests something of the isolation Hale has experienced—turning to archaic texts to bolster him in his doubts. His reference to the "early martyrs" is to Christians who were persecuted under the Roman Empire for putting their allegiance to the Church first. The connection in his mind seems to be that, like the martyrs, Hale resists submitting his conscience to an authority he disagrees with—while Margaret thinks of the martyrs primarily for their association with mainstream Christian teaching, which she fears her rather is rejecting.

Mr. Hale explains, "I suffer for conscience's sake, my child," and that he has attempted to stifle his doubts for too long; the bishop's offer of a new preferment has brought things to a crisis. He admits that he has been too much a coward to tell Mrs. Hale the news. He explains that they will be moving to the manufacturing town of Milton-Northern, in Darkshire, because he can earn a living there, and because there are no Helstone connections there.

Gaskell emphasizes the importance of acting according to conscience. By making Margaret his confidant instead of his wife, Mr. Hale anticipates the leadership role that Margaret will soon come to occupy within the household. Milton, the primary setting of the story, will be a place entirely different from what the Hales have known.

Mr. Hale asks Margaret if she will mind breaking the news to Mrs. Hale. Margaret "[shrinks] from it more than from anything she had ever had to do in her life before," but she "conquers" herself and agrees. Mr. Hale explains that his old Oxford tutor, Mr. Bell, a Milton native who owns property there, has heard of an opening for a private tutor in that city.

This is the first example of Margaret having to undertake a duty that would seem to fall more naturally upon her father, steeling herself against her natural inclinations in order to do what's required of her. The cost of dissent is evident in the fact that Mr. Hale's job as a tutor, while respectable, is a substantial step down from the position of Anglican priest.

Margaret wonders scornfully what need manufacturers have of classic literature or gentlemanly pursuits. Mr. Hale says that some manufacturers "really seem to be fine fellows, conscious of their own deficiencies, which is more than many a man at Oxford is." In particular, Mr. Bell has recommended his tenant Mr. Thornton, who seems to be an intelligent man. Mr. Hale hopes that his life will be busy, even if it is not happy, and free from painful reminders of Helstone.

Margaret is prejudiced against the manufacturing class, assuming that they wouldn't be interested in the kinds of things her own class values. Mr. Hale points out that awareness of one's weaknesses is an underappreciated part of being educated.

Margaret agrees that the contrast between Helstone and Milton will be a relief, though she has "almost a detestation for all she had ever heard of the North of England, the manufacturers, the people, the wild and bleak **country**."

Margaret sees a complete contrast between Northern and Southern England, though her disdain for the former is based entirely on rumor, not personal experience.

They agree that leaving within a fortnight will be best, and that Margaret must tell Mrs. Hale by the following evening. Though resigned, Margaret can't help another passionate outcry: "You cannot mean…to be for ever separate from me, from mamma—led away by some delusion—some temptation!" Mr. Hale affirms it, but offers his daughter God's blessing, and they embrace.

Margaret understands religious doubt as something that would be produced by weakness. By placing himself outside the Church, Mr. Hale does separate himself from the family in a way, as they can't receive the Church's sacraments (like Communion) together as they've always done. Mr. Hale's decision creates a tangible crisis for the family, not simply a matter for his private intellect, as they are uprooted from all they've known.

CHAPTER 5

That night, Margaret sits in her bedroom, reflecting on the day and filled with sorrow that "seemed to have pressed the youth and buoyancy out of her heart, never to return." Henry's marriage proposal seems like a mere dream, next to the painful reality of Mr. Hale's leaving the Church. She stares out at the outline of the church in the darkness, feeling that God seems unreachable.

In contrast to Margaret's youthful delight in returning to the forest, she now begins to feel the weight of responsibilities beyond her years. Romance seems a trifling problem next to Mr. Hale's deserting the Church and its impact on the family. Because the Church has been so closely integrated into her family life and identity, it makes sense that she would experience her own crisis of faith.

Just then, Mr. Hale steps into Margaret's room and asks her to pray with him, so they kneel by the window-seat and recite the Lord's Prayer. Margaret feels the closeness of God once again and decides she will have to trust God to reveal the path one step at a time. She passes a fretful night dreaming unpleasantly of Henry Lennox, then wakes up unrefreshed, with Mr. Hale's doubts pressing on her once again.

Mr. Hale's and Margaret's shared prayer represents the bond the two still share as fellow Christians. Margaret begins to understand that her life isn't going to unfold in the predictable, safe pattern she'd envisioned when leaving London; her character will be shaped through change and struggle.

While Margaret knows that her father would have delayed telling Mrs. Hale the news until the last possible moment, she is "of different stuff" and breaks it to her mother as they walk around the garden that morning, blurting the whole of it in a few blunt sentences. Mrs. Hale begins to cry, sure that there must be some mistake. Margaret gives what details she can, conscious that "it was an error in her father to have left [Mrs. Hale] to learn his change of opinion…from her better-informed child."

Margaret is already stronger than her father in certain ways—something that will become clearer as the story goes on. She also doesn't shrink from admitting her father's weakness to herself, realizing he has delegated responsibilities to her that he ought to have seen through himself.

Mrs. Hale is impatient and dismissive of Mr. Hale's religious doubts and hurt by his failure to consult her. However, Margaret manages to distract her with talk of Milton, and they discuss the "factory-people" among whom they will be living. Mrs. Hale wonders, "Who on earth wears cotton that can afford linen?" Margaret replies that she isn't standing up for cotton-spinners "any more than for any other trades-people," but consoles her mother that they will have little to do with such people.

Mrs. Hale expresses disdain for cotton—the basis of Milton's rapid economic boom. Margaret doesn't expect to have personal contact with trades-people, anticipating that their social contacts will be similar in Milton to what they've been in Helstone.

That evening Mr. Hale returns home with a timid look "almost pitiful to see in a man's face," and Margaret leaves Mrs. Hale weeping on his chest. She retreats to her room and finally lets go of her own self-control, crying until Dixon comes into the room some time later. Dixon is indignant about Mr. Hale's "turning Dissenter at his time of life" and wonders what Mrs. Hale's father would have said. Margaret, offended at having these words spoken to her face, sends Dixon from the room. Dixon heeds Margaret and respects her from that time forward.

Mr. Hale is associated with traditionally feminine traits throughout the book. Margaret, in contrast, doesn't freely express her emotions, showing the burden she feels to support her parents. Dixon understands "turning Dissenter" (a non-Anglican Protestant) to be inappropriate for a middle-aged clergyman and an example of how Mr. Hale doesn't measure up to his wife. However, Margaret asserts her authority, and Dixon can't help respecting it.

Mrs. Hale becomes too ill from stress to be of use, and Mr. Hale is too depressed to deal with the practical questions of moving. Margaret finds that the weight of decision-making has been thrown onto her. She reflects on the contrast between the relative superficiality of her life in London and her present burdens; now, "every day brought some question, momentous to her, and to those whom she loved, to be settled." She brightens, however, when she comes up with the plan to settle Mrs. Hale and Dixon at Heston, a seaside town, while she and Mr. Hale search for a house in Milton.

While Mr. Hale's decision started it all, Margaret is essentially responsible for carrying out the consequences. Though the circumstances are weightier, she is again caught up "in a whirlwind of some other person's making." Though forced by circumstance, she begins to show a knack for planning and taking initiative.

CHAPTER 6

On the last day in Helstone, Margaret is "calm and collected," knowing that if she indulges her feelings of heartache, no one will be left to act. She walks around the decaying garden, remembering her walk there with Henry Lennox only two weeks ago. Soon she hears a poacher walking in the woods beyond the garden and, though she normally has no fear of poachers and wishes them success, she rushes inside the house. She talks with Mr. Hale about his last day of parish visitations; he grieves the sufferings of those he is leaving behind and wonders if he should go back on his decision. Margaret tells him that it's bad enough to believe him in error, but it would be worse to know him to be a hypocrite.

As will become characteristic of her, Margaret suppresses her emotions for the sake of those who depend on her. Her world has changed dramatically from two weeks ago, symbolized by the altered state of the garden. The poacher—someone who hunts on other people's property—alarms Margaret with a sense of intrusion on her predictable world; though even here, she sympathizes with someone who was probably in difficult straits. Mr. Hale wavers anxiously, and Margaret helps him to regain his backbone—a swapping of stereotypical roles.

The following day, the Hales bid farewell to Helstone for the last time. When they arrive in London, they pass familiar houses and shops, and even acquaintances; Mrs. Hale even spots Henry Lennox passing by in the street. Margaret thinks of him as "a relic of Helstone." The family spends a friendless night in a hotel. Margaret feels that many friends would receive them if they came in gladness, but that "London life is too whirling" to deal with the sorrows of friends.

The Hales' stop in London highlights their disconnected status—they don't belong to any particular place right now. In Margaret's mind, London has already become a place that's insulated from the hard things of life. And even Henry, whose friendship had been a bright spot in Margaret's London life, now seems unreachable, belonging to a former phase of life.

CHAPTER 7

The next day they arrive in the small seaside town of Heston. Margaret reflects that, even in this small Northern town, "everything looked more 'purposelike,'" the colors are **grayer**, the clothing more utilitarian, and the people more relentlessly busy. The family settles into temporary lodgings, and Margaret finally allows herself the luxury of resting in the present, without fretting about past or future.

Margaret notes certain contrasts between North and South, as she will have plenty more occasion to do soon. To her, Northerners seem far more pressed by the needs of the present moment, less open to beauty and enjoyment compared to the South.

One day Mr. Hale and Margaret set out for Milton so that they can search for a house, and so that Mr. Hale can meet his pupil, Mr. Thornton. On the approach to Milton, they see a "deep lead-colored cloud" hanging over the horizon. The scent of vegetation fades and gives way to the smell of **smoke**. They travel through "long, straight, hopeless streets of regularly-built houses" and past puffing factories, having to stop frequently to make way for vehicles loaded with cotton.

Margaret realizes how much industry dominates life in Milton—even her senses are overwhelmed with it. The environment is described as characterless and unvarying, and cotton claims the right-of-way in the streets, emphasizing its importance.

Margaret and Mr. Hale visit a series of houses, finding that their money doesn't stretch as far in Milton as they are used to; none of their options are suitable. Finally, Margaret suggests that they return to the second house they'd seen, in the suburb of Crampton; Margaret comes up with a plan to maximize the use of the limited number of rooms they will have, joking, "I am overpowered by the discovery of my own genius for management." The house is marred by excessive ornament, especially the ugly wallpaper, but they hope the landlord can be charmed into changing it.

The cost of living in Milton is higher than they are used to, because of the city's rapid economic boom. Margaret discovers a knack for adaptability in limited circumstances, responding quickly to their changed environment rather than shrinking from it. The Milton taste for "ornament" signals class difference—the newly prosperous display their wealth, while the genteel classes find this showy and ostentatious.

After Mr. Hale drops Margaret off at the hotel for lunch and goes to speak to the landlord, Margaret discovers that Mr. Thornton has been waiting for them in the hotel. Margaret goes in to see him with "the straight, fearless, dignified presence habitual to her," having "too much the habits of society" for any awkwardness. Mr. Thornton, meanwhile, is quite surprised to be greeted not by a middle-aged clergyman, but by a dignified young lady "of a different type to most of those he was in the habit of seeing." He can't summon words at first, so Margaret greets him with, "Mr. Thornton, I believe!" and invites him to sit down. He finds that Margaret "[assumes] some kind of rule over him at once," and he does as she bids.

Margaret doesn't shy from taking initiative in her interactions with Thornton from the very beginning, setting the tone for their entire relationship. Thornton is instantly silenced by Margaret's dignified bearing, suggesting that she will exert an unusual degree of influence on him as the story continues.

When Margaret tells Thornton about the house they are renting, he knows the place. Now having seen Margaret, "with her superb ways of moving and looking," he regrets thinking that such a "vulgar" place would suit the Hales. At the same time, Thornton can't help interpreting Margaret's proud demeanor as contempt, imagining that she sees him as "a great rough fellow" and almost wanting to leave "these Hales, and their superciliousness."

Thornton has made assumptions about the Hales based on their status, but now he thinks that Margaret's environment ought to match her striking beauty. Yet, he also feels self-conscious in front of Margaret and affronted that this educated Southerner might look down on him.

After Thornton and Margaret make halting attempts at conversation, Mr. Hale returns, and Thornton revises his opinion of the family, though Margaret makes him feel so awkward that he declines to stay for lunch with them. When they return to Heston that evening, Margaret struggles to describe Mr. Thornton to Mrs. Hale. She says that he is about thirty, "not quite a gentleman," with an inflexible look that she should not like to bargain with.

Margaret is likewise perplexed by her first encounter with Thornton and isn't sure how to categorize him, as he doesn't resemble her concept of a gentleman. Thornton's "inflexible" bearing seems to intrigue and challenge Margaret just as Margaret's dignity and reserve both attract and repel Thornton.

When Margaret further describes Thornton as a "tradesman," Mr. Hale corrects her, saying that the Milton manufacturers are very different from tradesmen. Margaret concedes. She also warns Mrs. Hale about the gaudy wallpaper in their new home. But when they arrive to settle in Milton, "the obnoxious papers were gone." The landlord declines to tell them that the papers were removed not at the request of Mr. Hale, but "at the one short sharp remonstrance of Mr. Thornton, the wealthy manufacturer."

Margaret's early notion of "shoppy people" is being enlarged and refined. The disappearance of the wallpaper suggests a few things—that Thornton meant what he said about Margaret's unsuitedness to "vulgar" surroundings; that he's capable of acts of thoughtfulness; and that Thornton commands great authority in Milton, even outside the gates of the cotton-mill.

CHAPTER 8

The Hales are out of spirits when they arrive in their new home on a foggy day—they "must endure **smoke and fogs** for a season; indeed, all other life seemed shut out from them by as thick a fog of circumstance." Margaret reads a letter from Edith, whose new life at Corfu seems "all out-of-doors, pleasure-seeking and glad." Margaret reflects on the contrast between her untroubled life in London and her present circumstances; she also knows that Henry, had she accepted his proposal, would not have understood her father's issues of conscience. The latter, at least, makes Margaret thankful that things have not turned out differently.

The fogs of Milton match the Hales' sense of disorientation and uncertainty about their future. Edith's carefree Mediterranean life stands in stark contrast to the Hales' cramped, gray surroundings. But Margaret seeks to be philosophical about her circumstances, rather than indulging in self-pity, and her instinct about Henry's attitude later proves to be a wise one.

Mr. Hale meets with additional pupils, some of them boys who had left traditional schooling early in order to enter trades, and some of them young men who, like Thornton, want to resume their disrupted education. Mr. Thornton is Mr. Hale's oldest pupil and also his favorite, and the two spend many lessons engaged in conversation. Mr. Hale finds Thornton rather grand in his success, but Margaret wonders who may have been trampled on in the pursuit of that success.

Milton's industrial boom creates unusual educational needs, requiring people to balance the importance of schooling with the importance of commercial success. Despite their differences in class background, Thornton and Mr. Hale strike up a ready friendship. Margaret, however, remains suspicious of Thornton's profession and how he got where he is. She is already aware that the toll of manufacturing success might fall differently on masters of industry and their workers.

Margaret undertakes a lengthy search for a servant to assist Dixon and finds it a very different experience from hiring respectful young girls from Helstone school. Margaret is "repelled" by the "rough uncourteous manners" of the Milton girls, as well as by their frank curiosity about the Hales' financial means, seeing that the Hales aren't engaged in trade. Most girls, she finds, prefer the wages and independence of working in a mill.

Margaret's puzzlement about Thornton extends to her interactions with Milton's young women—they don't behave like the servants she's known in the South, and that affects the Hales' ability to recreate Helstone living—marked by plenty of domestic help—in a Milton setting. Likewise, the Hales don't map easily onto Milton people's class expectations. Gaskell also touches on the fact that manufacturing opened doors of financial independence to women.

In the course of her search for a servant, Margaret frequently finds herself in the streets of Crampton just as crowds of men and women are pouring forth from the mills. At first, she's frightened by the boldness and jesting of the crowds; the girls even comment freely on Margaret's clothing. She is eventually won over by their harmless, friendly remarks. The workmen, however, openly comment on Margaret's looks, to her annoyance.

Margaret is becoming used to rubbing elbows with people much different from her. She quickly moves beyond discomfort as she adjusts to the frankness of Northern manners, though differences in Northern men's attitudes toward women remain jarring.

One day, a bedraggled middle-aged workman compliments Margaret's smile. She takes an interest in this particular man, especially when she later sees him walking with his daughter, who is evidently ill. Later, in the early spring, Margaret encounters them again and offers the girl some flowers she's just picked. The three talk, and the father is touched by Margaret's clear concern for the girl's weakness.

Gradually, as Margaret spends more time among Milton's masses, she begins to notice individuals more. Her natural compassion, cultivated in Helstone, helps her open up to a young woman in need, opening the door to genuine friendship.

Margaret learns that the two are named Nicholas and Bessy Higgins. She is surprised when they wonder why she wants to know their names and address—in Helstone, it would have been understood that she intended to pay a call. Though Higgins admits he's not fond of strangers coming to his house, he relents in light of Margaret's kindness to Bessy. From that day forward, "Milton became a brighter place to her," because she has found "a human interest."

Here, Margaret bumps up against another regional difference. As the village clergyman's daughter, she'd taken her humanitarian role among Helstone's poor for granted; but in Milton, her attitude is taken for condescension. In spite of the rocky start, however, Margaret's interest in the Higginses is genuine, and her affection for Milton grows because of this specific human attachment.

CHAPTER 9

The next day, Mr. Hale announces, to Mrs. Hale's dismay, that he has invited Mr. Thornton to tea for that night. Based on her earlier interaction with him, Margaret wryly describes Thornton as someone "who would enjoy battling with every adverse thing he could meet with—enemies, winds, or circumstances." But, despite her reluctance to see him, Margaret helps Dixon prepare for the guest.

The Hales' anxiety about entertaining Thornton is reflective of their changed circumstances—their smaller lodgings and fewer servants require greater flexibility, though Margaret gamely steps in. Margaret continues to feel ambivalent about Thornton based on her initial impressions of him.

Meanwhile, in the Thornton house, Mr. Thornton is having a conversation with his mother. Mrs. Thornton sniffs at the thought of her son changing his clothes in order to have tea with an "old parson" and warns her son not to be ensnared by Margaret, "a penniless girl." Thornton laughs at this idea, considering that when last he saw Margaret, she acted as though she was a queen and he was her "humble, unwashed vassal." This is enough to cause Mrs. Thornton to decide on the spot that she hates Margaret.

Mrs. Thornton takes her family's newfound wealth seriously and is accordingly disdainful of her son going to any lengths to show the Hales, whom she regards as lower-class, with honor. She's also viciously defensive at the mere suggestion that Margaret might not respect Thornton's prominence.

CHAPTER 10

When Thornton arrives at the Hales', he is struck by the fact that, although his own drawing-room is twenty times as fine as the Hales' small one, it is not one quarter as comfortable—the Hales' even contains books "not cared for on account of their binding solely," but are lying about as if they'd just been read. Mr. Thornton feels that "all these graceful cares were habitual to the family; and especially of a piece with Margaret." Thornton finds himself distracted by Margaret's beauty as she pours the tea and jokes with Mr. Hale.

Again, it's hinted that the Thorntons' lifestyle is that of the nouveau riche—the recently affluent who tended more toward display of their wealth. The Thorntons' home is coldly luxurious, but the Hales' humble home feels lived-in and welcoming. Thornton sees the comfortable touches as an extension of Margaret herself.

Margaret, too, observes Thornton, and notices the difference in both appearance and character between him and Mr. Hale. Her father has dreamy, "almost feminine" eyes and an emotional face; Thornton has earnest, penetrating eyes, a rare but bright smile, and the "resolved expression of a man ready to do and dare everything."

This is another example of Margaret's father having stereotypically feminine features, especially in contrast to Thornton's bold, confident characteristics. Margaret is drawn to the sincerity and daring she perceives in Thornton.

Mr. Hale and Mr. Thornton are discussing the steam-hammer. Thornton describes the advance of industry as "the war which compels, and shall compel, all material power to yield to science." He further says that he would prefer to live a "toiling, suffering" life in Milton than to live the "slow days of careless ease" enjoyed by the aristocratic South.

For the first time, Thornton takes up the subject of industry using militaristic language, describing it as an unstoppable, almost automatic force. He harbors his own disdain for the Southern way of life.

At these words, Margaret is roused to an angry defense of the South. Even if there is less invention and progress in the South, she argues, there is less suffering, also. There may be poverty, but the South's poor, she says, do not go around with such a "sullen sense of injustice" in their expression as Milton's poor do. Mr. Thornton regrets having hurt her feelings, but suggests that, if he does not understand the South, she does not understand the North any better.

Margaret has formed sweeping judgments about the attitudes of the North's lower classes. She also takes up her argument that the effects of progress are unequally distributed, and that while some advance, others are trodden underfoot.

Thornton goes on to admit that, in their early days, Milton's manufacturers were dizzied by their power. The pioneer manufacturer's sense of justice was "often utterly smothered under the glut of wealth" then raining upon him, and he did tyrannize his work-people. But today, he claims, "the battle is pretty fairly waged" between masters and workers.

Though Thornton admits that wealth can blind the powerful to injustices, he doesn't see a contradiction when he casts the relationship between classes as a "battle."

Mr. Hale inquires whether it is necessary to conceive of the relationship between classes as a "battle." Thornton believes it to be "as much a necessity as that prudent wisdom and good conduct are always opposed to, and doing battle with ignorance and improvidence."

Affirming his use of the word "battle," Thornton sees class conflict as a conflict essentially between good and bad.

One of the benefits of the industrial system, Thornton explains, is that a worker can raise himself to the level of master through his own exertions; in fact, everyone who lives with decency and sobriety comes over to "our ranks." Margaret replies coldly, "You consider all who are unsuccessful in raising themselves in the world, from whatever cause, as your enemies, then, if I understand you rightly." "As their own enemies, certainly," Thornton answers.

Thornton sees a certain degree of class mobility as a strength of the system, but he also ties such mobility to character—basically, those who have good character and work hard enough will succeed—in a way that disgusts Margaret.


Thornton feels that the only way to explain his meaning is to tell the Hales something of his life story, despite his hesitation to speak of it to people he doesn't know well. But finally, he begins, "I am not speaking without book." He explains that when he was a boy, his father had died under miserable circumstances, forcing him to find work in a draper's shop and to both support his family and save for the future out of his small earnings.

With his statement about "not speaking without book"—that is, not speaking of something he knows nothing about— Thornton acknowledges the importance of life experience in forming one's character. His theories about success and failure are founded on his own boyhood struggles.


Thornton does not feel that his present fortune has come about through luck, merit, or talent, but "simply the habits of life which taught me to despise indulgences not thoroughly earned." Therefore, he believes that the suffering of workers in Milton "is but the natural punishment of dishonestly-enjoyed pleasure" during some former period of life. He looks on such people not with hatred, but "with contempt for their poorness of character."

Thornton looks on the suffering poor as those who haven't learned the same lessons he has learned from difficult circumstances. One's circumstances, to him, are a direct reflection of one's character. It's also worth asking whether Thornton harbors his own type of nostalgia as he looks back on formative experiences.

When Thornton leaves, he approaches Margaret to shake hands. She is not prepared for this and bows instead. Too late, she realizes his intention and is sorry; however, as Thornton leaves, he mutters, "A more proud, disagreeable girl I never saw."

Thornton and Margaret continue to misread one another—shaking hands might be an overfamiliar gesture to Margaret, though more common in the North. Thornton interprets her formality as snobbishness.

CHAPTER 11

After Thornton leaves, Margaret remarks that she liked Thornton's account of being a shop-boy better than anything else he had said. She scorns his attitude toward the poor of Milton, as he does not seem to think it "his duty to try to make them different," or to give them any of the advantages he had enjoyed in boyhood. Mrs. Hale is surprised at Margaret's comments, given Margaret's earlier attitude about "shoppy people," and thinks that Mr. Hale shouldn't have brought such a person into the house "without telling us what he had been."

Margaret admires Thornton's character in raising himself from humble circumstances, but argues that certain privileges helped him get where he is, and that he should feel responsible for affording the same to the poor under his authority. Mrs. Hale seems to miss what Margaret's arguing, though she rightly perceives that her daughter's attitudes have changed since Helstone. Humorously, she is also rather shocked at having let a former shopworker into their home for tea—underlining just how deeply ingrained class-based assumptions are, even when one's environment changes.

Mr. Hale fills in some of what Thornton had declined to share—namely, that his father had committed suicide after engaging in wild financial speculations and failing. No one came forward to help the family. Much later, after years of hard work and self-denial, Thornton returned and quietly paid back all of his father's creditors.

These aspects of Thornton's experiences weigh heavily on him, as will be seen later in the story. The fact that the Thorntons struggled alone likely also shaped Thornton's attitudes about pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps.

Margaret says it is a pity that "such a nature should be tainted by his position as a Milton manufacturer." When Mr. Hale asks what she means, Margaret says that Thornton measures everything by the standard of wealth, judging others because they lack his own character and capabilities. She concedes that Thornton is a remarkable man, but declares that she personally dislikes him.

Margaret sees the strengths of Thornton's character, but feels they're not shown to best advantage in his current role, and that his own success blinds him from seeing others with clarity and compassion.

Margaret goes to bed worrying about Mrs. Hale, whose health appears to be suffering from the **smoky** air and heavier domestic strain of life in Milton. Once, Margaret overheard her mother praying for endurance in bodily suffering. But Mrs. Hale doesn't confide in Margaret about her illness. Margaret decides to redouble her search for a servant to take more of the household burden off her mother.

The drastic adjustment to Milton life exacts a physical toll, and though Margaret feels shut out from her mother's situation, she assumes responsibility for improving Mrs. Hale's situation.

One day, when she has been out interviewing servants, Margaret runs into Bessy Higgins in the street. Bessy's health is not much better, and she tells Margaret that she is "longing to get away to the land o' Beulah." When Margaret asks Bessy if she wishes to die, Bessy explains that if Margaret had had a life like hers, she might be glad enough to die. She adds that if Margaret had come to visit as she'd promised, she might understand something more of Bessy's life. Margaret asks if she may visit now, and Bessy, though hurt, is won over by Margaret's sincerity.

Bessy's matter-of-factness about death and her longing for heaven ("Beulah" is a reference to the Bible's heavenly Jerusalem) are surprising to Margaret, likely used to less vivid metaphors and more euphemisms surrounding death. Gaskell also hints at the ways that one's experience can shape one's expressions of religious faith, a theme that will recur often in the two women's conversations.

When they arrive at the Higginses' house, Bessy is exhausted and feverish, asking Margaret, "Do you think such a life as this is worth caring for?" Margaret urges her not to be impatient with her life and to remember that God has granted it to her and planned its course.

Margaret's response sounds like a somewhat rote response she's given when making house calls in the past, suggesting that she doesn't yet grasp much of Bessy's story on a personal level.

At this moment, Nicholas Higgins enters. Higgins tells Margaret he doesn't want Bessy preached to— "she's bad enough as it is, with her dreams and her methodee fancies, and her visions." It's fine if such things amuse her, he says, but he doesn't want her hearing more than she has to.

Bessy's father reduces her "fancies" to something that might distract her in the present, but aren't meaningful in themselves. "Methodee" refers to the Methodist movement that was particularly popular among the working classes of mill towns in the ninteenth century. Whether or not Bessy attended a Methodist church, she would likely have come into contact with Methodist (and other Dissenting) spirituality around Milton.

When Margaret asks Higgins if he doesn't agree with her about God, he replies, "I believe what I see, and no more…when I see the world…bothering itself wi' things it knows nought about, and leaving undone all the things that lie in disorder close at its hand—why, I say, leave a' this talk about religion alone, and set to work on what yo' see and know." Margaret soothes the ailing Bessy further and goes home feeling sad and thoughtful.

Higgins is concerned that Bessy's beliefs promote a passive attitude in the fact of pressing, real-world problems. Higgins' reservations about traditional faith may hint at Gaskell's Unitarian values, which valued social action over theological speculation.

CHAPTER 12

Though Thornton has asked her to, Mrs. Thornton is reluctant to call on Mrs. Hale and Margaret. She makes a big deal about whether the visit is important enough to warrant the expense of hiring horses for the carriage, though she finally settles on doing so. Thornton prevails upon his younger sister, Fanny, who always complains of ailments and has none of her mother's or brother's strong qualities, to accompany Mrs. Thornton, and asks them to find out if there is anything they can do for the invalid Mrs. Hale. Mrs. Thornton, being relatively new to society, is actually shy and ill at ease visiting new people. This means that when she enters the Hales', she looks "unusually stern and forbidding."

Mrs. Thornton continues to consider the Hales as being beneath her; however, being newly elevated within Milton society, Mrs. Thornton struggles with her own insecurities about her place and her relationships with others.

During the visit, Margaret must rack her brain to sustain a conversation with Fanny, who was very young during the Thorntons' years of poverty and seems to know little of hardship or struggle. The subject of Mrs. Thornton's fondness for Milton comes up, and Mrs. Thornton asks whether the Hales have visited any of the factories or warehouses and says she will be glad to procure Margaret's admission to one of them, should she "condescend to be curious." As she and Fanny leave, she tells Fanny that they will be civil to "these Hales," but warns Fanny not to befriend Margaret.

Fanny's upbringing has been strikingly different from her older brother's, and Gaskell reflects this in her pampered, shrinking personality, in contrast to both Mrs. Thornton's and Margaret's. Mrs. Thornton finds Margaret's incurious attitude about manufacturing to be provoking; this feeds into her preconception that the Hales look down on her family, and makes her look down on them in return.

CHAPTER 13

As soon as the Thorntons leave, Margaret hurries to the Higgins' house to visit Bessy. Bessy asks to hear about Margaret's childhood home in the **country**. Margaret has not spoken of Helstone since she left it, though she often dreams vividly of it. She is happy for the chance to reminisce to Bessy. "I cannot tell you half its beauty," she tells her, describing the shade of the trees, the tinkling of the brook, the birdsong, and the commanding voice of a faraway farmer, "[reminding] me pleasantly that other people were hard at work in some distant place, while I just sat on the heather and did nothing."

Margaret's memories of the beauties of Helstone are shaped by the comparative drear and colorlessness of her new home. Her memory of the commanding farmer also seems a bit tone-deaf in context of a conversation with Bessy, illustrating the fact that Margaret has never had to labor for survival.

Bessy longs for such rest, after experiencing both hard work and, since she got sick, fitful idleness. She also confesses to Margaret that she sometimes fears in the night that there's no God, that she's been born "just to work my heart and my life away." But, when she's in her right mind, she remembers the book of Revelation by heart and draws comfort from its promises of the next life.

For Bessy, life has always been consumed with work, so she looks to the apocalyptic passages in the Bible to fuel hope in a better life (meaning Heaven) than what she's known on earth.

When Margaret asks her more about her life, Bessy explains that she has been sick since about the time that her mother died, at which time she began to work in a carding-room, where she inhaled bits of cotton fluff and was gradually sickened by it. She kept working there because she didn't want to be thought "soft," and she wanted to keep up Mary's schooling and her father, Higgins', love of books and lectures. She mentions that she is 19, and Margaret must hold back her tears, as she realizes the contrast between the two of them, despite the fact that they are the same age.

Bessy is probably suffering from a disease called byssinosis, also known as "mill fever" or "cotton workers' lung," contracted in poorly ventilated cotton mills. Gaskell uses Bessy's sufferings to highlight the problem of dangerous working conditions faced by many millworkers, and the contrast between Bessy's resignation to death and Margaret's youthful vitality is stark. Bessy's motivation to work is also interesting, as it shows how education and learning were valued even among the working class.

From that day forward, Mrs. Hale increasingly becomes an invalid herself. As Margaret thinks back to Edith's wedding a year ago, she thinks that she would have shrunk from the troubles to come, had she known what was coming. Yet each day, she finds, has been endurable, with sparks of enjoyment amidst sorrow. She also reflects on the new patience she has observed in her mother. Mrs. Hale's tendency to whine and complain has faded, and she is now "gentle and quiet in intense bodily suffering, almost in proportion as she had been restless and depressed when there had been no real cause for grief."

Margaret's character has strengthened as she's been plunged into circumstances she never expected or sought. Likewise, when faced with legitimate suffering, Mrs. Hale's complaining character softens into patience and perseverance, showing Gaskell's conviction that character is malleable even in the late stages of life.

Mr. Hale, however, appears to be willfully blind to Mrs. Hale's condition, and is even irritated when Margaret expresses anxiety. Nevertheless, he says sadly, "I wish one could do right without sacrificing others." He maintains that his wife would never conceal from him any serious health complaint. But Margaret hears him pacing worriedly in his bedroom that night.

Whereas Mr. Hale concealed his religious doubts from his wife a year ago, now Mrs. Hale conceals the seriousness of her condition from her husband. To some degree, her condition is a result of Mr. Hale's act of conscience, showing how costly such dissent could be.

CHAPTER 14

As her illness advances, Mrs. Hale begins to confide in Margaret more and more. One evening, she begins talking about Frederick—the taboo subject Margaret has yearned to hear more about. Mrs. Hale often dreams of Frederick being in a terrible storm at sea. Margaret asks to be told more about what happened to Frederick, since she was too young to be told at the time. Mrs. Hale sends Margaret for a packet of letters she has saved in a cabinet.

Margaret starts to occupy the role of confidant to her mother as she has already done for her father; she is established as the emotional bedrock of the household. The fact that she's being told Frederick's story further shows how Margaret has matured in her mother's eyes.

Margaret brings the "yellow, sea-stained letters." As Mrs. Hale looks through them, Mrs. Hale tells Margaret what Frederick experienced at sea. Frederick, she explains, had been under the charge of a tyrannical Captain Reid. Reid had ordered some sailors to race down the rigging, threatening the loser with a vicious flogging. The lagging sailor, dreading this fate, flung himself toward the deck and was fatally injured by the fall. Some time afterward, a mutiny took place on board the ship, with Captain Reid being set adrift. The Hales learned from the newspapers that Frederick had not only been implicated in the mutiny, but had been charged as "a traitor of the blackest dye" for his involvement. When they came to understand the situation, however, they were proud of their son's stand against injustice.

Frederick's subplot shows that taking stands against injustice is something that runs in the Hales' family—a value he seems to have picked up from his parents—and is another example of the importance of following one's conscience, even when the circumstances are catastrophic.

Margaret agrees with Mrs. Hale's assessment of Frederick's actions. "Loyalty and obedience to wisdom and justice are fine," she says firmly, "but it is still finer to defy arbitrary power, unjustly and cruelly used—not on behalf of ourselves, but on behalf of others more helpless."

Margaret's statement about defiance in the face of injustice anticipates some of the attitudes she will cultivate and actions she will take later on in the book.

Mrs. Hale longs to see Frederick again, but knows that some of his shipmates have been apprehended and hanged, the court claiming that the sailors had been led astray by their superior officers. She is inconsolable with the knowledge that if he risked a journey to England, Frederick would be hanged as well.

The risk to Frederick for his act of conscience is even graver than the risk his father took in abandoning his living in Helstone, and places an even greater strain on his family.

CHAPTER 15

The next day Mr. Hale and Margaret walk to the Thorntons' to return Mrs. Thornton's call. When they arrive at Marlborough Mills, they must walk past the immense mill, from which issues a deafening "clank of machinery and long groaning roar of the steam-engine," in order to reach the Thorntons' house. Margaret wonders why the Thorntons do not prefer to live in the country or suburbs, away from such terrible noise. Inside the Thorntons' house, she sees that the furniture is carefully bagged up and the house kept meticulously clean, so as to avoid a dusty buildup from the mill. All this effort has been taken not to "help on habits of tranquil home employment, [but] solely to ornament, and then to preserve ornament from dirt or destruction."

The cotton-mill dominates the Thorntons' home life, to the extent that their belongings must be protectively bagged against pollution from the very machinery that has helped to secure their wealth. The "new rich" preoccupation with "ornament" is portrayed as pointless, as it doesn't promote peace or comfort within the home. Gaskell is making an implied critique of wealth for wealth's sake.

When Mrs. Thornton comes in, Margaret gives a halting account of Mrs. Hale's illness, not wanting to distress Mr. Hale. From this Mrs. Thornton gathers that Mrs. Hale has some "fanciful fine-ladyish indisposition" and that she could still have come if she'd chosen to; Mrs. Thornton is accordingly offended and unsympathetic.

Mrs. Thornton insinuates that Mrs. Hale is a pretentious Southern aristocrat. The behavior she critiques, though, is actually more characteristic of her daughter Fanny, suggesting that class alone isn't determinative of people's character.

The three discuss Mr. Thornton's love of his studies with Mr. Hale. Mrs. Thornton says that study of the classics is fine for people of leisure, but she doesn't think her son's time is wisely spent in this pursuit. "Classics," she says pointedly, "may do very well for men who loiter away their lives in the **country** or in colleges; but Milton men ought to have their thoughts and powers absorbed in the work of today."

Mrs. Thornton's forthrightness to the Hales is quite rude, dismissing Mr. Hale's background out of hand. Her prejudice against education also points to the way that the rise of manufacturing disrupted traditional class expectations: a man didn't need to be classically educated in order to be professionally successful.

When Margaret suggests that a variety of interests helps to avoid rigidity of mind, Mrs. Thornton says that Thornton only needs to pursue one interest: "to hold and maintain a high, honorable place among the merchants of his country." His name is respected not only in England but across Europe—though "idle gentlemen and ladies" are unlikely to know of him, she adds scornfully.

Mrs. Thornton seems to be more invested in her son's prominent social standing and international name recognition than in scientific ingenuity and advancement, which seem to be bigger motivations for Thornton himself. She also doubles down on her class/regional prejudice against people like the Hales.

Mr. Hale and Margaret are aware that they had never heard of Mr. Thornton until Mr. Bell had mentioned his name, and that Mrs. Thornton's world "was not their world of Harley Street gentilities on the one hand, or country clergymen and Hampshire squires on the other." Mrs. Thornton reads Margaret's expression and infers that Margaret sees her as a closed-minded old woman. Margaret denies this and explains that they had heard of Mr. Thornton through Mr. Bell.

The class difference is transparently obvious to the Hales; their past social world didn't have room for people like the Thorntons.

Mrs. Thornton retorts that Bell can know little of Thornton, since he lives "a lazy life in a drowsy college." But she expresses appreciation for Margaret's frankness, since many young women would have shrunk from giving an impression of flattery by speaking positively of her son. Margaret laughs heartily at the implication that she has any romantic designs on Thornton. Her laughter does not endear her to Mrs. Thornton.

Not content to disparage Mr. Hale, Mrs. Thornton also mocks Hale's friend and mentor. However, she's met her match in Margaret, who doesn't hide her feelings about Mrs. Thornton's presumption.

Mrs. Thornton mentions that a strike has been threatened in Milton. Margaret asks what the people are going to strike for, and Mrs. Thornton snorts that they are out to gain other people's property. They might claim that they want higher wages, she says, but they really want to become masters themselves and to make the masters their slaves: "They are always trying at it; they always have it in their minds; and every five or six years, there comes a struggle between masters and men."

Mrs. Thornton's view of the workers is, if anything, even more antagonistic than her son's view, and more paranoid. To her, the relationship between masters and workers is a perpetual struggle based on greed and resentment.

Margaret asks whether this environment of struggle does not make Milton very rough. Mrs. Thornton says that of course it does, and she describes a time that she was forced to seek refuge on the roof of a factory, with only a pile of stones to defend her against an angry crowd trying to force its way inside. She tells Margaret, "If you live in Milton, you must learn to have a brave heart, Miss Hale…South country people are often frightened by what our Darkshire men and women only call living and struggling." Margaret is afraid that she might prove to be a coward.

For all her brashness, and her assumption that Southerners don't understand struggle, Mrs. Thornton is stout-hearted. She and Margaret have this in common. Her charge to Margaret to "have a brave heart" doesn't go unanswered, though in ways that will come back to haunt Mrs. Thornton.

That evening, Mr. Thornton visits the Hales, bringing the address of a doctor Mrs. Thornton has recommended. Mr. Hale asks about the strike, and Mr. Thornton immediately "assumed a likeness to his mother's worst expression," repelling Margaret. He says that the "fools" may strike if they want to, but "because [the manufacturers] don't explain our reasons [that trade isn't flourishing, and so the Milton masters can't afford to raise wages], they won't believe we're acting reasonably. We must give them line and letter for the way we choose to spend or save our money."

Thornton believes that the manufacturers must proceed in business in the way they see fit, without including their workers in the discussion, and resents workers' "foolish" pretensions to the contrary.

Margaret mentions that she finds Milton "strange." When Thornton asks why, she explains that she has never seen "a place before where there were two sets of people always running each other down." Margaret continues that, from what she has heard, it seems that the masters would prefer that their workers remain ignorant, "be merely tall, large children…with a blind unreasoning kind of obedience." Mr. Thornton is offended, considering this a slanderous statement.

Margaret doesn't argue with Thornton on the basis of economic theory, but of observations about human nature—a tactic that recurs in their discussions.

Mr. Hale speaks up to add that he has been "struck by the antagonism between the employer and the employed" that he has observed, and even inferred from Thornton's own statements. Mr. Thornton considers this and responds that he considers his interests to be identical with those of his workers. Perhaps in some utopia, he adds, unity between the classes might be possible.

Thornton's position, that the interests of the "head" and "hands" are identical, and that no other approach is possible given current social conditions, is a paternalistic one common at the time.

Thornton says that he does consider the workers to be like children, though he does not believe the masters have anything to do with making or keeping them in that state, and that a "wise despotism" is the best government for them. Mr. Hale says it seems to him that the "children" are becoming adolescents, for whom friendship and advice are more appropriate than absolute rule. Margaret tells a story about a man who kept his child hidden away for decades, in hopes of protecting him from error, until the father died, at which time the sheltered child, turned loose in the world, did not have the ability to discern good from evil.

Mr. Hale and Margaret both object to the paternalistic point of view. Both argue that treating workers like children will backfire, inciting rebellion or infantilizing people.

Mr. Thornton argues that he would not feel justified in taking too great an interest in the lives of his men outside of working hours, as he values his own independence too highly to imagine directing others' lives in this way: "I imagine this is a stronger feeling in the North of England than in the South." Mr. Hale suggests that this fear of interference stems from too little "equality of friendship between the adviser and advised classes," and too much unchristian isolation among brothers.

Thornton sees his "paternal" influence ceasing outside the factory gates and attributes this to his Northern independent streak. Mr. Hale suggests that the class divide has more to do with insufficient mixing among different classes, and the unhealthy suspicion this creates.

Thornton continues to argue that he has no right to press his views on independent Darkshire men merely because he is their employer. Margaret agrees with this, but says that as a human being, who happens to wield immense power over a group of other human beings, he *does* have a responsibility. This is because God has made people interdependent, their welfare interwoven.

Margaret appeals to a higher responsibility than that of the mere employer, arguing that Thornton's position gives him great influence over people's welfare, and that no one is meant to live in isolation.

Thornton asks whether Margaret is ever conscious of being influenced by others, and whether that influence occurs directly or indirectly. In other words, which is more effective—moral exhortation or personal example? He argues that honest behavior before his men communicates more than a lecture ever could; "what the master is, that will the men be, without over-much taking thought on his part."

Thornton argues that exhorting workers to improve themselves wouldn't be that effective anyway, and that quietly modeling virtue and good behavior is more likely to influence people—what will become an off-and-on argument for him and Margaret.

Margaret, laughing, points out that when she sees "men violent and obstinate in pursuit of their rights, I may safely infer that the master is the same." Thornton, miffed, replies that she is just like everyone else who fails to understand the industrial system—"You suppose that our men are puppets of dough, ready to be molded into any amiable form we please." Moreover, Milton masters are busy with many responsibilities that go beyond those of an employer; they are among "the great pioneers of civilization."

Margaret, albeit in a joking tone, argues that if Thornton's approach were foolproof, then there wouldn't be strikes. Thornton is offended by her comments; he thinks her understanding of human nature is wanting. Moreover, masters of industry occupy an exalted position that doesn't leave them much time for mingling with workers.

Margaret remarks coldly, "I am trying to reconcile your admiration of despotism with your respect for other men's independence of character." Irritated by her tone, Thornton reiterates that he chooses to be "the unquestioned…master" of his men during working hours, and then their relationship ceases, at which point he respects their independence of character. Before leaving, he apologizes to Margaret for speaking to her hastily that evening, given that he is "but an uncouth Milton manufacturer." She smilingly forgives him, but does not offer him her hand, which Thornton chalks up to pride.

Margaret and Thornton are at an standoff at this point. While there are no hard feelings between them, Margaret's failure to shake hands like a Northerner leads to misunderstanding again.

CHAPTER 16

The next day, Dr. Donaldson, the doctor Mrs. Thornton has recommended, pays a visit. Margaret is excluded from Mrs. Hale's room while he is there. After the doctor finishes his examination, Margaret summons all the grandeur she can and asks the doctor to share the news with her, since Mr. Hale is not home. Dr. Donaldson argues that Mrs. Hale had specifically requested that Margaret not be told, but Margaret overrides him with an appeal to his own wisdom and experience. Quickly taking the measure of her character, he relents and tells her the diagnosis in two short sentences. Margaret is briefly stunned into silence.

Margaret assumes leadership in her father's absence, mustering all the confidence and dignity she can to persuade the doctor to confide in her. Though the nature of Mrs. Hale's illness isn't revealed in the book, the diagnosis is clearly devastating.

Margaret sheds just a few tears before gathering herself and questioning Dr. Donaldson about Mrs. Hale's prognosis. He explains that the degree of suffering is difficult to predict, but that alleviation will be possible, although there is no hope of recovery. He promises to return as a friend, not merely as a doctor. As he leaves, he thinks of Margaret, "What a queen she is!... it's astonishing how much those thorough-bred creatures can and do suffer. That girl's game to the back-bone."

Dr. Donaldson is accordingly impressed by Margaret. His reference to "thorough-bred creatures" is to upper-class women, though, unlike Mrs. Thornton, he readily sees Margaret's capacity to bear great suffering, suggesting that toughness can be found in all kinds of women, even if they've enjoyed privileged backgrounds.

After Dr. Donaldson leaves, Margaret laments and prays in private for a few moments, wondering how she will bear to watch Mrs. Hale's suffering and Mr. Hale's corresponding agony. She decides that her father must not be told the news just yet. When she joins Mrs. Hale, her mother is displeased at first that the doctor has broken his word to conceal the news from Margaret. In response to Margaret's pleading, however, she eventually relents to let Margaret become her nurse.

Margaret quickly and resignedly assumes the mantle of guiding her family through the suffering to come. Far from leaning on her father, she even decides to shield him from grief for the time being and to share in the heavy physical burden of nursing her mother. She is the stronghold of the family both practically and emotionally. The year before, she had quailed at difficult conversations; yet now, steeled by the changes in her family's circumstances, she proactively steps into burdensome roles.

Mrs. Hale reflects that she will never see Helstone again, and that this is a just punishment for all her discontentments and complaints while living there. At the thought of her firstborn, Frederick, however, her relative calm is shattered, and she dissolves into violent hysterics. With Dixon's help, Mrs. Hale is finally calmed enough to sleep, and Margaret and Dixon discuss Mrs. Hale's fate. When Margaret apologizes for her crossness lately, Dixon admits that she likes seeing Margaret's spirit, "the good old Beresford blood."

Mrs. Hale shows a deeper reflectiveness than previously, in keeping with the way that illness has sobered her, and it's clear that Frederick's exile has weighed heavily on her over the years.

After Margaret leaves, Dixon says to herself, "Bless her!...There are three people I love; it's missus, Master Frederick, and her. Just them three." She supposes that Mr. Hale was born in order to marry Mrs. Hale, but Dixon doesn't love him because "he should ha' made a deal more on [Mrs. Hale], and not been always reading, reading, thinking, thinking. See what it has brought him to!"

Despite Dixon's gruffness, she bears a deep affection for Mrs. Hale and the children. She doesn't think much of Mr. Hale, however—blaming his preoccupation with study for the family's straitened circumstances and his wife's suffering. She sees his scholarly bent as indulgent and his lack of success as proof of its pointlessness.

CHAPTER 17

Margaret is slightly cheered when she takes a walk and decides to visit Bessy Higgins. Nicholas Higgins is also at home. He tells Margaret that although Bessy is disheartened by the upheaval of the strike—the third strike she has seen in her life—he's optimistic that this one will be effective. "Why do you strike?" Margaret asks, explaining that she had never heard of strikes before she moved to Milton.

Having heard Thornton's perspective, Margaret now has the opportunity to hear about the strike from the perspective of a working family—in the context of one of the inter-class relationships she's challenged Thornton to seek out.

Bessy interjects that before this strike is over, she will be in the Holy Jerusalem. Higgins retorts that Bessy is "so full of th' life to come, [she] cannot think of th' present," whereas he feels bound to do the best he can here and now.

Higgins' objection to Bessy's heavenly mindedness comes up again. Of course, Bessy might argue that she has been so full of suffering in the present that she can't help but think of the life to come if she is to remain hopeful.

Margaret questions Higgins further about the strike as he puffs on his pipe. Finally, he says he doesn't know what life is like down South, but he's heard "they're a pack of spiritless, down-trodden men...too much dazed wi' [starving] to know when they're put upon." Northerners, however, are acutely aware of "when they're put upon."

Higgins argues that Southern culture creates a docile working class that doesn't know how to stand up for its rights, whereas working-class people in the North refuse to be mistreated and "put upon."

Bessy says that she'd prefer to live in the South. Margaret points out that there are sorrows to be borne everywhere. She also thinks that Southerners "have too much sense" to strike, though Higgins thinks they have "too little spirit." Bessy argues that previous strikes didn't gain them anything, and that they nearly starved. Higgins says that that strike was foolishly managed, and that it will be different this time.

Margaret pushes back against simplistic characterizations of either region, emphasizing that no place is without its sorrows, but she also can't help defending her native South in a prejudiced way.

Margaret wants to understand the reason for the strike. Higgins explains that five or six masters are trying to pay their workers less than the wages they've paid for the past two years. He would sooner starve than yield to them—"that's what folk call fine and honorable in a soldier, and why not in a poor weaver-chap?" Margaret protests that a soldier dies in the cause of others.

Margaret seeks greater understanding from her friends' perspective, but she still sees Higgins' reasoning as self-serving.

Higgins argues that striking is "just as much in the cause of others as yon soldier"—and the cause is more immediate, since he seeks justice not on behalf of distant strangers, but on behalf of neighbors. Margaret asks why workers don't try to reason with masters; Higgins reacts to this with contempt, saying that Margaret is a foreigner who can't understand. The masters' talk about the "state of trade," he claims, is simply a "bug-a-boo" brought forth to frighten the workers.

Higgins responds to Margaret's criticism with a nuanced comparison of the goals of the soldier and those of the striking laborer. He also shares Thornton's antagonistic view of the classes and the fruitlessness of trying to overcome those barriers.

When Higgins goes outside to finish his pipe, Bessy frets over the possibility that her father will go to the gin-shop; he's not a drunkard, she says, but the discouragements of a strike sometimes bring ugly things out of people.

Bessy's comments suggest Gaskell's compassion for those who give in to vices in the midst of discouraging circumstances. While drunkenness is wicked, the events of people's lives might make them more vulnerable to it.

When Bessy says that Margaret has always lived in pleasant, green places and never known want or care, Margaret warns her not to judge. She confides in Bessy about Mrs. Hale's deathly illness, Mr. Hale's ignorance of the dire situation, and Frederick's exile. She asks Bessy, "Do I not know anxiety, though I go about well-dressed, and have food enough?" She adds that God portions out each person's lot in life.

Bessy has made sweeping assumptions about Margaret based on her external appearance and class. In response, Margaret wisely argues that suffering is universal.

Bessy asks Margaret's pardon, explaining that she has often imagined herself to be one of those doomed to die by a certain prophecy in Revelation. "One can bear pain and sorrow better," she adds, "if one thinks it has been prophesied long before for one; somehow, then it seems as if my pain was needed for the fulfillment; otherways it seems all sent for nothing."

Bessy interprets her personal suffering in light of the biblical Book of Revelation. She even sees it as needed for the "fulfillment"—the circumstances that will bring about the end of the world and God's restorative judgment—because this is better than seeing her suffering as meaningless. In this way, Bessy's suffering has communal implications, as she doesn't want it to be just about her. This forms an interesting comparison to her father's view of the union's striving.

Margaret rejects Bessy's interpretation, since she believes that God doesn't willingly afflict people. She adds that Bessy should not dwell so much on these prophecies, "but read the clearer parts of the Bible."

Margaret sees Bessy's interpretation as naïve and out of keeping with her own understanding of God's character. She thinks Bessy should focus on the parts of the Bible that Margaret herself finds more relevant.

While Bessy agrees that this might be wiser, she argues that in Revelation, she hears promises "so far different fro' this dreary world…It's as good as an organ, and as different from every day, too." She says she finds the Book of Revelation to be far more encouraging than any other part of the Bible.

While Gaskell herself likely agreed more with Margaret's attitude toward Scripture, she does have Bessy resist Margaret's well-meaning advice. Bessy clings to specific, thoughtful reasons for favoring Revelation; it lifts her out of the circumstances all around her and helps her to find strength and meaning in them.

Margaret offers to come back and read Bessy some of her favorite Bible chapters. She thanks Bessy for doing her so much good—she has realized that her own grief isn't the only grief in the world. Bessy marvels at this; she "thought a' the good-doing was on the side of gentlefolk." As Margaret leaves, Bessy muses, "I wonder if there are many folk like her down South. She's like a breath of **country** air, somehow."

Seeing Bessy's endurance of suffering, though different from how she does so herself, seems to strengthen Margaret for what faces her at home and helps her not to dwell on her own problems. Bessy, meanwhile, assumes that the poor are always on the receiving end of goodness, suggesting that she's imbibed some paternalistic attitudes herself.

CHAPTER 18

When Margaret gets home, Mr. Hale asks about Dr. Donaldson's visit, and Margaret downplays the gravity of Mrs. Hale's condition. Her heart aches, however, to see that he is restless and anxious for his wife. They have received an invitation to a dinner at Mrs. Thornton's, and Mrs. Hale is insistent that Margaret and Mr. Hale should go without her.

In this passage, Margaret continues to take responsibility for protecting her father's emotions, trying to shield him from the pain of learning how serious Mrs. Hale's condition really is.

At the Thorntons' the next evening, Mrs. Thornton, John Thornton, and Fanny discuss the dinner RSVPs. Mrs. Thornton still isn't quite sure what to make of the Hales, and her son's regard for them. She finds Mr. Hale "rather too simple for trade," Mrs. Hale "a bit of a fine lady, with her invalidism," and Margaret a puzzle, since she "seems to have a great notion of giving herself airs," despite not being rich.

Mrs. Thornton continues to struggle to neatly categorize the Hales, just as they've struggled to classify tradesmen within their worldview. However, that doesn't stop her from making harsh (and misguided) judgments about them.

After pacing awhile, Thornton abruptly tells Mrs. Thornton that he wishes she would like Margaret. Surprised, she asks whether he has had some thought of marrying her, at which he laughs, "She would never have me." Mrs. Thornton agrees, remembering the way that "saucy jade" had laughed at her when she raised a similar idea. Thornton says that although he doesn't expect to marry Margaret, he asks that Mrs. Thornton be ready to be a friend to Margaret, in case she needs it. Though Mrs. Thornton cannot forgive Margaret her pride, she agrees, for her son's sake.

Thornton can't deny having romantic feelings for Margaret, and though he has no expectation of those feelings being returned, he still wants to look out for her, in the likelihood that she'll soon lose her mother. This again points to Thornton's capacity for kindness on an individual level.

Thornton changes the subject to the strike, which he's certain is imminent. He explains what he doesn't believe the strikers understand—that with the Americans entering the market, his mill must reduce costs in order to stay competitive, meaning it's impossible to continue paying his workers at the same rate. In summing up the affair, he concludes, "It is too bad to find out that fools—ignorant wayward men like these—just by uniting their weak silly heads, are to rule over the fortunes of those who bring all the wisdom that knowledge and experience…can give." He may end up getting workers from Ireland.

Thornton continues to view his discontented workers as ignorant fools, even though he feels no compulsion to enlighten them himself. Once again, he casts the two classes as wise versus foolish. The threat of importing laborers from Ireland is ominous, since this controversial practice often led to violence.

CHAPTER 19

Although she is not going herself, Mrs. Hale has a young girl's enthusiasm for the upcoming dinner party, fretting about what Margaret will wear. Margaret obligingly models all her dresses for her mother. Later, she visits Bessy, who is amazed to hear that the Hales have been invited to the Thorntons', since the Thorntons visit with the "first folk in Milton," and the Hales don't have much money.

Bessy's distinctively Northern understanding of the upper class is limited to manufacturers and their peers, which doesn't include the Hales.

When Margaret describes the white silk dress she will wear to the party, Bessy reveals that she had a vision of Margaret before she ever saw her, "drest in shining raiment." Margaret gently tells Bessy that the vision was only a dream. Bessy points out that many biblical characters had dreams and saw visions; even Higgins thinks highly of dreams. She begs to be allowed to visit Margaret to see her in her dress before the party, and Margaret finally relents.

Bessy's and her father's esteem for dreams, and Margaret's skepticism, suggests a class distinction between folk expressions of religious faith and Margaret's more restrained orthodoxy. Margaret also represents an angelic figure to Bessy.

They talk about the strike, and Margaret feels guilty about going to a fancy dinner when so many workers' families are now hungry. Bessy says she shouldn't feel bad—"some's pre-elected to sumptuous feasts, and purple and fine linen—maybe yo're one on 'em…if yo' ask me to cool yo'r tongue wi' th' tip of my finger, I'll come across the great gulf to yo' just for th' thought o' what yo've been to me here."

Bessy refers—rather confusedly—to the story of the rich man and Lazarus in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 16, in which "a great chasm" is fixed between the poor Lazarus, who is comforted after death, and the rich man, who is tormented. Moreover, the rich man in the parable didn't show mercy to the poor, which Margaret does. This is another example of Bessy's selective and inventive use of the Bible.

Margaret tells Bessy she is feverish. It won't be riches or lack thereof that divide people at the last judgment, but "faithful following of Christ." As Margaret puts a cool cloth on Bessy's forehead and rubs her cold feet, Bessy says that workers keep dropping by to tell Higgins their woes, and it's driving her out of her wits. She compares the continual conflict between masters and workers to the battle of Armageddon.

Margaret continues to correct Bessy's class-driven interpretations. In referencing Armageddon from the Book of Revelation, Bessy casts class conflict in apocalyptic terms—as something that will bring about the last judgment and the end of the world.

When Higgins comes in, seeming drunk, he hears Bessy mention the dinner party and wishes he could attend, so he could have a captive audience of mill-owners and give them a piece of his mind. Margaret hastily leaves.

Class division is underlined by the fact that, by virtue of her station, Margaret has access to the manufacturers to a degree that their employee, Higgins, doesn't.

At home, Mrs. Hale has responded well to Dr. Donaldson's medications, raising the family's hopes. In contrast, gloom has descended on Milton because of the strike. Mr. Hale often talks with Mr. Thornton about the underlying economic principles of the strike. When Margaret listens to these conversations, she is repelled by Thornton's cool logic—her "whole soul rose up against him while he reasoned in this way—as if commerce were everything and humanity nothing."

Margaret sees Thornton's devotion to principle as an elevation of money over actual human beings, as he cares more for "commerce" than "humanity."

Margaret is both grateful for Thornton's compassion for her dying mother and resentful of his knowledge of Mrs. Hale's condition. She doesn't know how to reconcile his pitying expressions with the "hard-reasoning, dry, merciless way" he talks about trade: "the discord jarred upon her inexpressibly."

Given her discomfort with Thornton, Margaret resents his admission to the inner circle of those who know about Mrs. Hale's illness. She can't make sense of his genuine concern for a specific person, alongside his abstracted way of discussing business.

From Bessy and Higgins, Margaret hears another perspective altogether. Higgins is a committee-man for the strike, and Margaret hears him arguing with his downtrodden neighbor, Boucher. Boucher is afraid that his wife will die before the strike concludes, and if she does, Boucher says, he will hate Higgins and the entire union. He weeps as he describes watching his infant son wasting away from hunger. Higgins tearfully promises to buy food for the family immediately, and urges Boucher to take heart; the union will win this fight before long.

Gaskell uses Margaret's growing friendships across class boundaries to portray various perspectives on conditions in Milton. In addition, she shows that working-class perspectives aren't all the same. Boucher shows the human cost of the strike, and Higgins' reaction shows his tender-heartedness.

As the men leave, Boucher hopelessly calls the union "a worser tyrant than e'er th' masters were." He quotes the union, including Higgins, as having said, "Clem [starve] to death…ere yo' dare go again th' Union." He tells Higgins, "Yo' may be kind hearts, each separate; but once banded together, yo've no more pity for a man than a wild hunger-maddened wolf." Higgins replies that he is doing the best he can for them all; if he's doing wrong, it's because the masters have driven him to this situation. In the meantime, he says, there's no help for workers but to trust the union.

Boucher's plight shows the dilemma that some workers faced: siding with a strike meant that his large family might go unfed. He suggests that Higgins and the other union leaders don't care for individual people any better than the manufacturers do. Higgins, though moved, maintains that because of the masters' behavior, there is no better alternative for workers than to band together against them.

After the men leave, Bessy comments that Boucher is weak and unwise, but she pities him for all that. She thinks that if the union had to deal with Boucher face-to-face, they would let him go back to work. But, she adds, the Higginses won't let the Bouchers starve, because "if neighbors doesn't see after neighbors, I dunno who will."

In her father's absence, Bessy agrees with Boucher about the union's lack of humanity, but holds that it's up to neighbors—not abstract bodies—to take care of one another.

CHAPTER 20

After Margaret comes home with news of the Bouchers' plight, Mrs. Hale sends them a basket, and Mr. Hale goes to visit the family the next day. Returning home, Mr. Hale says that he doesn't know how to compare the Milton workers' situation with that of Helstone's poor, since their ideas of luxury and want are so different—"One has need to learn a different language, and measure by a different standard, up here in Milton."

Mr. Hale resumes a semblance of his former religious duties in caring for the Bouchers. He highlights the shifting social structure in Britain—poverty looks different, ostensibly less impoverished, in Milton than it did in the South, but it's perhaps even more filled with suffering, because of the way the industrial revolution had weakened traditional social structures.

Mr. Hale and Margaret go to the Thorntons' dinner party. Margaret is struck by the excessive ornament, "a weariness to the eye," and the elaborate meal, both different from her more restrained, London-cultivated taste. As they look outside at the adjacent mill, Mr. Hale asks whether the noise and **smoke** are not annoying. Mrs. Thornton says that she likes the reminder of the source of her son's wealth and that the noise is no more disturbing to her than "the humming of a hive of bees."

Margaret continues to find the Milton nouveau riche style irritating in its excess and showiness. Mrs. Thornton claims not to mind the proximity of the mill—her daily life and identity are of a piece with it—and makes a rather dehumanizing reference to the workpeople, suggesting that she doesn't see them as a factor in her wealth.

When Mr. Thornton comes in, he is struck anew by Margaret's dignified beauty. During the dinner, Margaret, too, is struck by Thornton's assured manner, confident in the respect of his peers. Margaret silently follows the mill-owners' discussion, by now knowledgeable enough to form her own opinion. She finds their "desperate earnest" refreshing compared to the wearisome, "used-up style" of London parties.

Margaret appreciates seeing Thornton is his own element. Even though she doesn't voice her opinion at the moment, she is also growing in her ability to understand and respond to the Milton environment. She even finds positive things about the manufacturers' sense of purpose, compared to the superficiality of the Southern aristocracy. Industrial innovation, Gaskell suggests, isn't all bad.

As the men talk, Margaret can't help admiring the Milton men's "exultation in the sense of power…a kind of fine intoxication, caused by the recollection of what had been achieved, and what yet should be."

Now that she's interacted with them firsthand, Margaret appreciates the manufacturers' ingenuity and potential, showing that she has grown substantially from the early days of dismissing "tradesman" out of hand.

After dinner, Thornton approaches Margaret. They begin to discuss the question of what constitutes a "gentleman." Thornton thinks that there is a distinction between a "gentleman" and a "true man." A man, he says, is "a higher and a completer being than a gentleman." The term "gentleman" describes a person in relation to others, while "manliness" is a quality considered in relation to one's self, to life, and to eternity. Margaret does not have time to form a response, as Thornton is called aside to discuss strike business with the other mill-owners.

Thornton shows his respect for Margaret by seeking out her company and perspective. He seems to see "manliness" as a higher form of masculinity, while the term "gentleman" is perhaps limited to one's interactions with other men, often filtered through class.

CHAPTER 21

Margaret and Mr. Hale talk about Thornton as they walk home. Mr. Hale thinks that Thornton looked anxious that evening. Margaret is glad of this—she thinks of the half-crazed Boucher compared to Thornton's unflappable coolness. Mr. Hale thinks that Thornton has a greater depth of feeling than Margaret gives him credit for, as Thornton has been forced to exercise great self-control from an early age. He tells Margaret that she's prejudiced against Thornton.

Mr. Hale suggests that Margaret doesn't appreciate the fullness of Thornton's character, especially how his driven youth caused him to develop emotional restraint.

Margaret replies that Thornton is the first manufacturer that she's had the opportunity to know, so it's not surprising that he's distasteful to her, at least initially: "he is my first olive; let me make a face while I swallow it".

Margaret says that her first manufacturing acquaintance may not be palatable to her at first, but suggests that this doesn't mean she'll always dislike him. She acknowledges that getting to know someone personally, rather than as a representative of a class, makes a difference in understanding someone.

When Margaret and Mr. Hale get home, they are met by an anxious Dixon. Dr. Donaldson is there; he has given Mrs. Hale an opiate to relieve terrible spasms, but he says she will rally this time. When Mr. Hale looks at his wife, whom "death had signed…for his own," he finally realizes the severity of her situation. He says it is cruel of Margaret not to have told him, but Dr. Donaldson defends her handling of the situation and tries to encourage him: "be a man, sir—a Christian." Mr. Hale replies that the unmarried doctor cannot possibly understand his agony, and he dissolves into "manly sobs."

Mr. Hale finally begins to come to grips with the reality of his wife's condition. Coming on the heels of Thornton's comments on "manliness," Gaskell's characterization of Hale's grief suggests that unrestrained grief isn't unbefitting for a man—it's one of the rare times that Mr. Hale is characterized in masculine terms more than feminine.

They sit up that night watching over Mrs. Hale, Margaret thinking how dreamlike the events of recent days now seem, and wishing she could get back the monotonous days of the previous winter, in order to enjoy more time with her mother. Mrs. Hale rallies slightly over the next few days. Dr. Donaldson sends Margaret to the Thorntons' to inquire about a water-bed Mrs. Thornton might lend them to enhance Mrs. Hale's comfort.

Compared to the gravity of her mother's impending death, everything else in life seems trivial to Margaret, and she reminisces for quieter days she took for granted at the time.

Margaret begins the long, hot walk to the Thorntons' lost in thought, but soon she notices an excited stirring among the crowds in the streets. By the time she reaches Marlborough Mills, she's aware of a "thunderous atmosphere" all around her. When she reaches the Thorntons', the nervous porter admits her, and Margaret is struck by the silence of the mill compared to the ominous sounds in the streets.

The streets of Milton have the feeling of a calm before the storm, setting up for the chaotic riot to come.

CHAPTER 22

In the Thorntons' drawing-room, Margaret sits alone for a while until Fanny comes in. Fanny explains that Thornton has imported workers from Ireland, and it has angered the Milton workers. The Irish workers are huddled fearfully inside the mill. When Mrs. Thornton comes in, no sooner can Margaret explain her request for the water-bed than they hear the angry voices of the crowd just outside the gate, and people begin to throw themselves against it.

The use of imported workers—what Miltons' workers call "knobsticks," or strikebreakers—often incited strike violence in industrial cities.

When Thornton comes in, he has a look of defiance on his face that makes him seem noble. Margaret has always dreaded finding herself a coward, but in this time of "reasonable fear and nearness of terror, she forgot herself, and felt only an intense sympathy—intense to painfulness—in the interests of the moment."

When Mrs. Thornton talked about her experience with the earlier strike, Margaret worried that she wouldn't show similar bravery; but now she rises to the occasion.

When the crowds knock the gate down, Fanny faints, and Mrs. Thornton carries her from the room. Margaret, however, won't leave Thornton's side. Out the window, Margaret sees Boucher fighting his way to the front of the crowd. "Who is Boucher?" asks Thornton in response to her cry of alarm. When he shows himself at the window, the crowd's yell "was as the demoniac desire of some terrible wild beast."

Though it's not realistic to expect that Thornton would know all his workers by name, Thornton's ignorance of Boucher is a good example of the lack of the masters' care for the individual that Margaret has decried. Meanwhile, the noise of the strikers sounds inhuman even to Margaret.

Thornton reassures Margaret that the soldiers will arrive soon "to bring [the crowd] to reason…the only reason that does with men that make themselves into wild beasts." As the men approach the mill door, Margaret pleads with Thornton: "Go down and face them like a man…Speak to your workmen as if they were human beings…If you have any courage or noble quality in you, go out and speak to them, man to man."

Thornton argues that these "beasts" can't be reasoned with, painting them in an inhuman light, but Margaret protests that the only way to deescalate the violence is by using reason and empathy. Thornton must speak with his workers "man to man," not master to worker or refined man to "wild beast."

Thornton's face clouds over as he listens to her, and he agrees. Margaret bolts the door behind him as he goes, then resumes her lookout at the window. In the faces of the crowd, she sees the same desperation and rage she has seen in Boucher. Suddenly she notices boys in the back of the crowd preparing to throw their heavy wooden clogs at Thornton. She immediately rushes outside, "standing between them and their enemy"; the crowd looks on in surprise and confusion.

Without a thought, Margaret rushes to insert herself in the violent situation to protect Thornton—taking advantage of the shock factor of a woman appearing in such a charged scene. This split-second decision also points to how deeply she cares for Thornton.

Margaret warns the crowd that the soldiers are on their way and begs them to go away peaceably. A man asks if the Irish workers will be sent packing. When Thornton says, "Never, for your bidding," the crowd lets loose in angry hooting. Margaret sees the boys with the shoes once again and throws her arms protectively around Thornton.

Though he faces the crowd, Thornton's defiance doesn't help defuse the situation. Meanwhile, Margaret instinctively protects Thornton from the threat of deadly violence.

A thrown clog misses them, but then a sharp pebble grazes Margaret's face, and she passes out. The sight of blood startles the crowd out of its passion, and they begin to retreat, but not before a man shouts, "Th' stone were meant for thee [Thornton]; but thou wert sheltered behind a woman!"

The sight of an injured woman seems to shame the crowd and deflate their desire for vengeance. Though a man mocks Thornton for being protected by a woman—and Margaret was naïve in thinking her feminine status would protect her—Margaret has achieved her goal of defusing the riot.

As the crowd vanishes, Margaret briefly comes to, but swoons again. Thornton carries her into the house. He confesses his love to the insensible Margaret: "No one can tell you what you are to me…you are the only woman I ever loved!" Mrs. Thornton comes in to tend to Margaret, not having heard her son's declaration, and Thornton tears himself away to tend to the frightened Irish workers.

The risk to Margaret's life—itself implicating that Margaret cares deeply for Thornton, romantically or otherwise—moves Thornton to fully recognize his feelings and to confess his love to her.

While Mrs. Thornton goes for a doctor, one of the serving-maids bathes Margaret's forehead and tells Fanny, who has crept out of hiding, about the confrontation outside. Fanny is shocked that Margaret would have been "so bold and forward" as to have put her arms around Thornton's neck. Margaret is conscious enough to hear this exchange, though too weak to respond.

Margaret's embrace of Thornton is interpreted much differently by onlookers than she had intended it. Fanny, who is spoiled and foolish, thinks only of the gossipy implications of Margaret saving Thornton's life.

By the time the doctor comes, Margaret has fully returned to her senses, but is still faint. Nevertheless, she is anxious to return home without giving her parents a chance to worry. After the doctor finishes treating her cut, she persuades them to order her a cab home.

Margaret is still more focused on caring for her parents than on worrying about her own sufferings, in keeping with the caretaking role she has assumed since their move to Milton.


CHAPTER 23

Mr. Thornton returns, after securing a good meal and a priest to help pacify the Irish workers. He is shocked to find Margaret gone. He tells Mrs. Thornton that he doesn't know where he would be if not for Margaret. "Are you become so helpless as to have to be defended by a girl?" his mother asks. Thornton says that not many girls would have acted as Margaret did. "A girl in love will do a great deal," retorts Mrs. Thornton. She doesn't know how to read the impassioned look Thornton gives her in response.

Mrs. Thornton, too, interprets Margaret's defensive act as the impulse of a lovesick girl—further suggesting that, by taking initiative in such a public way, Margaret exposes herself to public shame. She's like Frederick in her initiative, but unlike her brother, she challenges gender norms in doing so, and faces the resulting "disgrace."

Mrs. Thornton successfully dissuades Thornton from going to see Margaret that night. Later that night, however, Thornton asks her, "You know what I have got to say to Miss Hale, tomorrow?" She says that she does, and that he is bound in honor to do so, after Margaret had displayed her own feelings for him in such a public way. Thornton scorns this, saying he dares not hope that Margaret actually cares for him.

Like Fanny, Mrs. Thornton thinks that Margaret has compromised her virtue with a public display of affection. Unable to consider (or be grateful) that Margaret was just selflessly saving Thornton's life, Mrs. Thornton believes that her son must respond to Margaret's "indecency" by proposing marriage, to cover Margaret's shame.

Mrs. Thornton says that Margaret obviously does care for Thornton, and admits that she likes Margaret better for having finally come to her senses about him. She wants Thornton all to herself this evening, knowing that after Thornton proposes, she will stand second in his life.

Mrs. Thornton's single-minded devotion to her son temporarily overrides everything else—including her fierce dislike of Margaret and classism.

When Margaret gets home, she tells her parents nothing of what's just happened. There is a note from Bessy, but Margaret is too tired to go to her. She feels ashamed for "disgracing" herself by defending Thornton as she did. She thinks that she could not have shown such courage for anyone else, except that Thornton is so indifferent to her—"it made me the more anxious that there should be fair play on each side... If I saved one blow...I did a woman's work. Let them insult my maiden pride as they will—I walk pure before God!"

Margaret continues to fill the role of her parents' protector, this time by sparing them the violent and perhaps humiliating details of the events that have just unfolded. She does feel shame for having acted in such a public way, yet she believes that forestalling violence is appropriate, God-given work for a woman, and that even shame is a sacrifice worth making for the sake of fulfilling that calling.

Thornton sends the water-bed for Mrs. Hale, as well as a message specifically asking how Margaret is doing. Margaret reports that she's doing perfectly well. After bidding Mr. Hale goodnight, Margaret finally "[releases] her strong will from its laborious task." She retreats to bed and spends a miserable night haunted by "a deep sense of shame."

Margaret is still haunted by the "shame" of Fanny's and the maid's words about her while she appeared to be unconscious. Gaskell also refers to the strain involved in Margaret's immense, ongoing exertion of will—a further part of what "women's work" entails.

CHAPTER 24

The next morning, Margaret resolves not to think about the Thornton family, planning to visit Bessy instead. Soon, however, Mr. Thornton arrives and asks to see Margaret. Thornton, waiting nervously in the drawing-room, can't stop thinking about Margaret's protective embrace the day before.

In attempting to be brave and do the right thing, Margaret has brought more trouble and heartache on herself than she had foreseen.

Margaret stands before Thornton like someone "falsely accused of a crime that she loathed and despised." When Thornton begins to apologize for his "ingratitude" the day before, Margaret protests, "It was only a natural instinct; any woman would have done just the same. We all feel the sanctity of our sex as a high privilege when we see danger."

Margaret takes for granted that a woman "naturally" acts to prevent violence, trusting that the taboo against harming a woman will protect her. This assumption doesn't seem to be shared by most of those around her—suggesting that her action has more to do with her own unique blend of strength, courage, and compassion than she realizes.

Unable to keep the tenderness from his voice, Thornton tells Margaret that he chooses to believe he owes her his life—"to the one whom I love, as I do not believe man ever loved woman before." Icily, Margaret responds that his speech "shocks me. It is blasphemous...your whole manner offends me."

Margaret takes Thornton's words as a violation of the "sanctity" of her self-sacrificing act; the attribution of romantic feelings degrades it.

Blushing with indignation, Margaret reiterates that her behavior yesterday was in no way "a personal act between you and me," and that a gentleman would understand "that any woman...would come forward to shield, with her reverenced helplessness, a man in danger from the violence of numbers." She would more readily have sympathized with any other man in the crowd than with Thornton.

Margaret sees "helplessness" as a tool that enables her to act as a man in a comparable position could not have; thus, her weakness endows her with a special strength in the face of the crowd that unjustly threatened Thornton.

Thornton scorns her "misplaced sympathies," now believing that her "innate sense of oppression" motivated Margaret's noble act. He says that Margaret despises him because she doesn't understand him. Despite the bitterness of his words, he would still "[throw] himself at her feet, and [kiss] the hem of her garment." Margaret sees tears in his eyes and is sorry to have caused him pain, but does not see how she could act otherwise.

Thornton finally understands Margaret's motivations, but, despite his hurt and anger, he can't stifle his love and reverence for Margaret now that it's been stirred.

CHAPTER 25

Margaret can't help comparing Thornton's proposal to that of Henry Lennox the year before. The biggest difference, she thinks, is that there had been genuine friendship between herself and Lennox; but her relationship with Thornton "had been one continued series of opposition." She had thought, at first, that Thornton proposed out of compassion for her behavior during the riot the day before, so his evident regard for her is all the more shocking. Margaret feels that their whole conversation was a nightmare, and she wishes she had rejected him more sharply.

Margaret sees her relationship with Thornton as entirely antagonistic, so his proposal comes out of nowhere and distresses her even more than Henry's did.

Margaret decides to visit Bessy. When she arrives, Bessy is clearly feeling much worse, so Margaret rearranges her pillows without a word. Margaret begins reading Bessy some comforting passages from the Bible, but Bessy is distracted by thoughts of the riot. She tells Margaret that Higgins is devastated about it. She explains that the strike committee had charged the union to refrain from violence, wanting the public to see that the strike was being led by thoughtful men who cared about law and order. Now, because of men like Boucher, the union's work risks being undone. Boucher and her father had briefly come to blows the day before, then Boucher had disappeared.

The union has been trying to sway public opinion by conducting themselves decently, but the desperation of men like Boucher has foiled their attempts. The relationship between Higgins and Boucher symbolizes the tensions that stirred up the working class as they came to terms with the conditions imposed by rapidly expanding industry.

After reading to Bessy for a while, Margaret returns home and finds her mother singing the praises of the Thorntons' water-bed. The conversation gradually turns to the subject of Frederick, and soon Mrs. Hale is weeping and appealing to Margaret to find a way to bring Frederick home for a visit before she dies. Margaret promises, and, since Mr. Hale has gone out, it falls to her to write and send a letter to Frederick.

Margaret once again must take a monumental step in her father's absence, and her mother seems to recognize instinctively by now that this is Margaret's role.

Mr. Hale overtakes Margaret as she is walking home from the post office. When Margaret tells him what she's done, he explains the danger that Frederick will face by returning to England, that the Navy is unrelenting in its pursuit of those who've defied its commanding officers' authority. He says that Margaret should have waited for him before acting, but then concedes that he "durst not have done it myself."

Although he scolds her, Mr. Hale also implicitly recognizes that Margaret has greater courage and shows greater initiative than he does when it comes to big steps like this. Having defied authority so daringly the day before (though her family doesn't know it), Margaret, in effect, does so again by daring to sneak Frederick into their home.

CHAPTER 26

Mr. Thornton stumbles away from the Hales' house overwhelmed with heartbreak, feeling as though Margaret had become "a sturdy fish-wife" and had dealt him "a sound blow." Yet beneath his torment, he's aware that he still loves her. When a passing omnibus stops near him on the street, he boards it and rides it out of Milton into an outlying **country** town. The other passengers dismount, so he does, too.

The word "fishwife" implies a coarse-mannered, loud, violent woman, in humorous contrast to the dignity that normally attracts Thornton to Margaret. It shows that he's in a tailspin and confused about what to make of her. The fact that he would escape to the country—a place befitting Margaret more than Thornton himself—symbolizes Margaret's connection with nature and rural life.

Mr. Thornton walks briskly through the fields, reflecting on what a fool he's been and how little he understands Margaret. Over the course of the afternoon, he gains little besides "a more vivid conviction that there never was, never could be, any one like Margaret." At last he returns to Milton to face Mrs. Thornton.

The country fields provide a fitting backdrop for Thornton's mental wrestlings over Margaret, though Thornton comes to the conclusion that she escapes his or anyone's categorization.

Mrs. Thornton has sat in her dining room all day, bracing herself for news of her son's engagement. When she thinks of Margaret, she reflects that had Margaret been a Milton native, Mrs. Thornton might actually have liked her spirit, but Margaret is a prejudiced Southerner.

Mrs. Thornton admires the spirited traits in Margaret that she sees in herself, but can't look beyond those because Margaret's Southern origins overwhelm all else, in her mind.

When Thornton gets home, he tells Mrs. Thornton that no one cares for him but her. When she sees her son's dejection, "the strong woman tottered" for the first time in her life. She mutters a curse when Thornton tells her what's happened. But Thornton can't bear to hear her speak of her hatred for Margaret, and they agree to never discuss the subject again.

Thornton is his mother's weak spot, and she can't endure the insult of his being rejected. She's back to wholeheartedly despising Margaret.

CHAPTER 27

After Thornton returns from his **countryside** foray, his mind is clearer, and he immerses himself once again in the day's business. However, he has to constantly fight to keep his mind from drifting back to Margaret. In the street he bumps into and chats with Dr. Donaldson, who informs him that Mrs. Hale doesn't have many weeks to live. Thornton is shaken, and, though he has "no general benevolence,—no universal philanthropy," he goes directly to Milton's fruit-shop and buys a basket of the freshest fruits he can find. He insists on delivering the basket himself, though he draws attention as he passes through "the busiest part of the town for feminine shopping."

Though Thornton isn't given to philanthropic impulses in the abstract, he once again shows his capacity to care for individuals. Also, it's striking that just as Margaret entered a male-dominated zone in order to resist the strikers, Thornton enters a predominantly feminine district in order to offer solace, albeit indirectly, to Margaret—suggesting that each of them must venture out of their traditional spheres in order to meet the other.

Thornton warmly presents the fruit basket to a delighted Mrs. Hale, but quickly leaves without acknowledging Margaret. As the Hales sample the fruit and praise Thornton's kindness, Mr. Hale remembers the currant bushes in the old Helstone garden. On top of the events of the past two days, this casual memory breaks Margaret's composure, and she retreats to her room to sob.

Mr. Hale's subtle remembrance of Helstone, coming at such an emotionally charged moment, overwhelms Margaret. Helstone seems even more a respite from suffering compared to what Margaret has experienced in recent days in Milton.

Later, Dixon comes in and tells Margaret that Mary Higgins has come with the news that Bessy died that morning. Mary wants Margaret to come to the Higgins's to see Bessy's body laid out ("a notion, these common folks [have], of its being a respect to the departed," says Dixon). Though she shrinks at first from the idea, Margaret agrees to go.

Dixon sees Mary's wish as a marker of working-class identity. Thus it's another occasion for Margaret to step across class boundaries, in a way she wouldn't have done in Helstone, in the interests of personal friendship.

CHAPTER 28

When Margaret sees the restful smile on the deceased Bessy's face, she is glad to have come to the Higgins'. Soon Higgins arrives home, in shock from hearing the news on the street, and weeps violently. When he starts to leave, Mary is distressed; Bessy's last words had been to keep her father from drink. Margaret stands defiantly in the doorway.

As Margaret had defied angry crowds just a day earlier, today she defies Higgins when he appears to be bent on going to the local gin-shop to drown his sorrows in alcohol. This seems to confirm that Margaret's instinct is to place herself in harm's way even where isn't a romantic attachment.

Though Higgins looks as though he will strike her, Margaret doesn't stir an inch. They remain in a long standoff, until Higgins, grumbling, relents; Margaret feels "that he acknowledged her power." Soon, in a "bold venture," she proposes that Higgins accompany her home for tea.

Just as Margaret earlier asserted power over Thornton by her unconscious dignity, and over the angry crowds through her vulnerability, here she forces Higgins to submit to her power, too. She crowns her victory by taking the feminine prerogative—itself a "bold" step—to cross class boundaries once again, protecting Higgins and his family by bringing him home with her, away from the temptation of alcohol.

When Margaret and Higgins arrive at the Hales', Margaret runs ahead to warn her father about the surprise guest. When she notices the slight "repugnance" on Mr. Hale's face, Margaret urges him that "he really is a man you will not dislike—if you won't be shocked to begin with," then adds, "you must not wonder at what he says; he's an—I mean he does not believe in much of what we do." Mr. Hale thinks, "Oh dear! A drunken infidel weaver!" but gamely does as Margaret asks.

Margaret's action of bringing a working-class man in for tea is a crossing of boundaries, as evidenced by Mr. Hale's reaction. But Margaret prevails upon her father to set aside his preconceptions for the sake of the occasion. Apparently, though, the word "atheist" or "infidel" is so unheard of as to be unsuitable for polite conversation.

When Margaret checks on the two men a short time later, she finds that Mr. Hale's courteousness has "called out…all the latent courtesy in" Higgins—who is, after all, neither "an habitual drunkard nor a thorough infidel," simply never having found "any form of faith to which he could attach himself, heart and soul."

Mr. Hale's hospitality makes Higgins at home in unaccustomed surroundings. Gaskell portrays Higgins as spiritually homeless, but not as devoid of spirituality—a bold presentation for the time, influenced by Gaskell's Unitarian outlook.

Higgins and Mr. Hale are discussing religion. Higgins says that if Mr. Hale had been born and bred in Milton, he wouldn't have strong belief, either. Milton folk, he explains, are too preoccupied with earning their bread to worry about unproven teachings about things they've never seen. Furthermore, if Christian teachings were true "in men's heart's core," the masters would be as insistent upon those teachings as they are about political economy.

Higgins makes an insightful argument that the strain of life in Milton stunts people's capacity for religious faith, because everyday concern for survival smothers concern for anything else. He also makes the claim that if masters really believed in Christianity, then they would be pressing belief on their workers just as they trumpet their economic theories.

Higgins ultimately admits that, after seeing the life Bessy has lived, he must believe "that there is a God, and that He set her her life…There's but one thing steady and quiet i' all this reeling world, and, reason or no reason, I'll cling to that." In a muttered aside, an emotional Mr. Hale tells Margaret that Higgins is no "infidel."

Mr. Hale, having been plagued by his own questions and doubts, seems to find a certain unexpected kinship with the "drunken infidel weaver's" own simple faith. Gaskell presents Higgins as a man of dignified convictions, even if they don't fit within a recognizable mold.

Mr. Hale and Margaret change the subject to the strike. As they listen to Higgins, they gather that the workers, like the masters, tend to think of their fellow men "as if they possessed the calculable powers of machines" and make "no allowance for human passions getting the better of reason." The workers are also contemptuous toward "them Irishers." Higgins explains that because certain workers defied orders to keep the peace, the strike is now at an end, and the mills will reopen tomorrow; but he doesn't know where he will find work himself.

As outsiders, the Hales are able to observe that workers have their blind spots just like the masters do—neither side fully accounts for the humanity of the other side (or, in the case of the "Irishers," for the humanity of meddling strikebreakers).

Mr. Hale thinks the strikers have made some mistakes in their understanding of wage levels, and he offers to read Higgins some passages from a relevant book. Higgins tells him there's no point, as he's tried reading a book of economic theory before and found it meaningless. Mr. Hale says that, regardless, the book would have told him the truth by arguing that even a successful strike can only artificially inflate wages for a brief time.

Mr. Hale, like Thornton and other manufacturers, naively assumes that if only workers come to an understanding of the correct economic theories, they will alter their view of striking accordingly—and presumably stop striking.

Higgins stubbornly replies that, while that argument may or may not be true, such books are still gibberish to him. Even if he should come to understand one, he adds, "I'll not be bound to say I shall end in thinking the same as any man. And I'm not one who [thinks] truth can be shaped out in words…Folk who sets up to doctor th' world wi' their truth, [must] suit [differently] for different minds."

Higgins maintains that economic theory just doesn't make sense to him, but even so, opinions aren't formed in such a mechanical way; ideas must be presented in a way that hearers can receive them, if they're to take hold and shape hearers' minds. It's actually a progressive way of thinking about education.

Mr. Hale wishes that the masters and men might be brought together to discuss such things, so that they might better understand one another's point of view. Margaret doubts that Thornton could be persuaded. Hearing Thornton's name, Higgins complains that Thornton ought to have made sure Boucher was punished for instigating violence. Margaret comments that the union doesn't seem to have done Boucher much good.

Mr. Hale, like Margaret, holds that face-to-face conversation is key to overcoming class conflict. Higgins resents Thornton's mercy to Boucher because of Boucher's role in rendering the strike ineffectual.

Higgins explains to Margaret that the union shuns and ostracizes any worker who won't join it. Margaret is shocked by this "tyranny." Higgins, though, maintains that if this approach is sinful, it's only what generations of unjust masters have driven them to; it's a necessary "withstanding of injustice," even if it causes harm to others in the process.

Margaret sees the union approach as dehumanizing, but Higgins sees ostracized workers as collateral damage in the larger fight for justice; their suffering, like all workers', must finally be laid at the feet of the masters.

As the conversation ends, Higgins quietly promises Margaret that he will go straight home and not to the gin-shop. Mr. Hale invites Higgins to remain for family prayer, and Higgins wordlessly agrees. Thus "Margaret the Churchwoman, her father the Dissenter, Higgins the Infidel, knelt down together. It did them no harm."

This prayer, comprised of three people of diverse faith, is no doubt a moment shaped by Gaskell's religious convictions—that people can pray together despite disagreement over belief. Both class and religious boundaries have thus been breached in the course of a single tea.

CHAPTER 29

The next morning, as Margaret and Mrs. Hale chat, Mrs. Hale is displeased by the Milton "provincialisms"—"factory slang"—that pepper Margaret's speech. Margaret defends the use of such speech, arguing that if using Milton expressions is "vulgar," then she was very "vulgar" when they lived in Helstone.

Margaret's defense of provincial speech—its expressiveness, and its cultural appropriateness—echoes Gaskell's own interest in English dialect. Margaret's comfort in using such language also shows how much she's come to feel at home in Milton.

Mr. Thornton enters as she says this, and Margaret feels embarrassed that she may have offended him. She is aware of Thornton's careful avoidance of her as he talks with her parents, and she yearns to return to "their former position of antagonistic friendship." Thornton, meanwhile, still feels bitter about Margaret's rejection, and yet finds "a stinging pleasure" in being in her presence.

Margaret comes to the realization that she and Thornton were, in fact, friends, and that she cares about what he thinks. Here she longs nostalgically for their earlier friendship, "antagonistic" and combative as it was.

CHAPTER 30

At Mrs. Hale's request, Mrs. Thornton comes to visit her the next day. Mrs. Hale has had a difficult night and looks much worse. Even Mrs. Thornton, who had doubted the reality of Mrs. Hale's illness, is softened by the woman's poorly appearance. Feebly, Mrs. Hale asks Mrs. Thornton to be a friend to Margaret in the event of Mrs. Hale's own death. Haltingly, Mrs. Thornton promises to be of what assistance she can to Margaret, though she is not given to tender affections. She also promises to correct Margaret if she ever sees her doing wrong. Though not entirely satisfied with this answer, Mrs. Hale thanks Mrs. Thornton.

Mrs. Thornton is clearly uncomfortable promising to befriend Margaret, though she seems all too eager to take on the role of correcting Margaret if she ever sees the girl doing something wrong. However, Mrs. Thornton isn't heartless enough to deny another mother who is on her deathbed. Her promise will come back to haunt Margaret.

Margaret and Dixon, meanwhile, discuss the possibility that Frederick might soon arrive and plan how to keep his coming a secret from all but the family. As they all watch Mrs. Hale suffer, Margaret must "act the part of a Roman daughter" to give strength to the despairing Mr. Hale.

The "Roman daughter," or "Roman Charity," was a figure from ancient literature, who breastfed her father who'd been jailed and sentenced to death by starvation. It's easy to see how such a figure captures Margaret's relationship with her father by this time—he is reliant on her for emotional sustenance.

Later that evening, the doorbell rings, and Margaret answers it to discover Frederick, who has arrived before his letter. Her heart is lightened as Margaret welcomes and tends to the brother she hasn't seen in years. The family reunion is "a joy snatched in the house of mourning." Margaret rejoices that Frederick has a knack for conversing with Mr. Hale, for nursing Mrs. Hale, and reminisces with her about Helstone.

Frederick's coming is not only a joyous reunion, but a chance for Margaret at last to unload some of her burden onto another capable shoulder, and the old family circle is complete once again, albeit temporarily.

Dr. Donaldson warns that Mrs. Hale won't live for many more days, and Frederick and Margaret grieve together. Frederick suggests that doing is better than mournful thinking at times like these, and Margaret is impressed by the way Frederick channels his energies into helping his parents and Dixon. However, Dr. Donaldson proves correct, and within a couple of days, Mrs. Hale rapidly worsens and dies.

Frederick's preference for action over morbid introspection seems to fit with his reputation for determined leadership in a crisis. However, Mrs. Hale's death is the first permanent rupture in the family circle, and nothing will be the same for the Hales from now on.

In the wake of Mrs. Hale's death, Margaret quickly rouses herself to be "a strong angel of comfort to her father and brother." Frederick finds that his preference for action fails him in the midst of grief; he can do nothing but weep. Mr. Hale just sits mutely by his wife's side. Margaret finds herself reciting passages from the Gospel of John to comfort him.

Margaret quickly reoccupies her role as "angel"—something beyond typical human powers—for the men in her family, pointing to the way that women were expected to be the "angel in the house" in the Victorian era. Margaret takes on a ministerial role for her father, the former priest, reciting the words that would once have come naturally from him. Margaret's leadership in the home isn't just physical and emotional, but spiritual.

CHAPTER 31

As Margaret helps Dixon in the aftermath of Mrs. Hale's death, she has no time to cry—while Mr. Hale and Frederick grieve, "she must be working, planning, considering. Even the necessary arrangements for the funeral seemed to devolve upon her."

Margaret channels her own grief into tending to the grief of the men around her, throwing herself into the pragmatic details of the funeral.

When Margaret briefly gives in to weeping, Dixon, not unkindly, tries to brace her up by pointing out that Margaret has been lucky not to experience any great loss before this. Margaret tries to get Mr. Hale's input on funeral arrangements, but he doesn't have the energy and refers her instead to his friend Mr. Bell.

There is no natural place for Margaret to express her grief, as Dixon scolds her for it and her father is of no help; she's truly on her own.

That evening, Dixon confides to Margaret that she doesn't think it's safe for Frederick to stay any longer. She saw a man named Leonards in town, a scamp of a young man who'd been acquainted with Frederick at sea. In the course of their chance encounter, Leonards made sneering remarks about Frederick and what a disgrace he is to his family. Margaret, Frederick, and Mr. Hale discuss it and agree that Frederick can't risk staying longer.

Much like Margaret is alone in coping with her grief, Frederick has no safe place to go in his home country. The family circle is disintegrating further, as the family prepares to lose Frederick, too.

When Frederick idly mentions getting a glimpse of Thornton at the door and thinking him "a shopman," Margaret feels annoyed and wants to correct him, but finds herself tongue-tied.

Margaret's earlier classification of Thornton as "a tradesman" has clearly been overturned, since she objects to Frederick's dismissive description.


Frederick expresses his wish that Margaret and Mr. Hale might join him in Spain, where he has a good position and plans to marry a girl named Dolores Barbour. Margaret asks to hear more about Dolores, who is a Roman Catholic. She sighs when reminded of Mr. Hale's change of religious opinion, realizing Frederick's own conversion to Catholicism explains why Frederick had not seemed to share her distress on the subject in his letters—Frederick, too, had been changing his opinions in the opposite direction, though "how much love had to do with this change not even Frederick himself could have told."

Frederick's conversion is presented almost as an aside—surprising at a time when Roman Catholics had only recently faced legal discrimination. Gaskell also acknowledges that religious conversions can have many different motivations, even romance. In any case, Margaret is alone among her family in yet another way, as the sole remaining Anglican.


Margaret wonders whether Frederick could clear his name in the event of a court-martial. Frederick explains that such courts care more for authority than for justice and doubts whether he could gather sufficient evidence of his well-intentioned motives for the mutiny. Margaret suggests that he meet with Henry Lennox on his way out of England the next day, and she duly writes a letter to Lennox explaining her brother's situation.

Frederick frankly explains that justice isn't always attainable, even through legal bodies ostensibly set up for that purpose—another example in the story of how individuals sometimes suffer for the sake of causes others deem more important.

CHAPTER 32

Margaret agrees to accompany Frederick to the train station the next day. She says she won't mind walking home in the dark, as she's gotten "very brave and very hard." The two arrive twenty minutes early at the train station and have a tender last exchange. Suddenly they spot Mr. Thornton riding past, scowling. Margaret also notices a young man staring impertinently at her when she goes inside to buy Frederick's ticket.

Margaret no longer doubts her own courage as she did before the riot; she now feels at home and able to fend for herself in Milton, proudly referring to herself now as "very brave and very hard."

Just before the train arrives, a rough-looking porter comes up, shoves Margaret, and seizes Frederick's collar, identifying him as Hale. Somehow, by "some sleight of wrestling," Frederick trips the man—presumably Leonards—and the man falls a short distance off the platform. Margaret then rushes Frederick onto the train. Sickened by the near miss, Margaret looks for Leonards on the ground, but he is gone. As she buys her ticket to catch the opposite train home, she hears the railroad workers talking about Leonards' drunken boasts that he would pursue Frederick.

Frederick's narrow escape, the fall, and Margaret's witnessing of the whole thing will prove to have enormous consequences for the rest of the story, and for Margaret's development.

CHAPTER 33

When Margaret gets home, she argues with Mr. Hale about attending Mrs. Hale's funeral. She wants to go, but middle-class women don't typically attend funerals because they're thought to be unable to control their emotions and are ashamed to show them; whereas poor women have no such inhibitions. Mr. Bell is too ill to come to the funeral, and Margaret is upset that Mr. Thornton proposes to accompany Mr. Hale instead.

As Margaret has become comfortable resisting class distinctions during her time in Milton, it isn't surprising that she would resist expectations in the case of her mother's funeral, too. Margaret is also bothered by Thornton's presumption in wanting to attend a family funeral.

Margaret receives a worrying letter from Frederick saying that he's lingered in London in hopes of meeting Mr. Lennox, who is currently out of town. She hides this news from her father, who is overcome with grief. She sits with him before the funeral and recites all the comforting Bible verses she can remember, finding that "her voice never faltered; and she herself gained strength by doing this."

Margaret continues to dutifully shield her father from grief and allow him to gain strength through her. In fact, far from shrinking from the task, she finds herself buoyed by it—suggesting that she's coming into her own in her spiritual leadership of the family.

After the funeral, Mr. Thornton approaches Dixon to ask how Mr. Hale and Margaret are doing. He is disappointed to hear that Margaret is bearing up well, since he'd hoped to comfort her. He is also disturbed by the memory of seeing her at the train station with a handsome young man, at such a late hour. It takes him "a great moral effort to galvanize his trust—erstwhile so perfect—in Margaret's pure and exquisite maidenliness." He imagines that the young man is the source of Margaret's strength in her grief. But Margaret never hears about Dixon's conversation with Thornton.

Being out in the evening with a man would have been seen as a potential compromising of a young woman's morals—something that doesn't seem to have crossed Margaret's mind, just as she was oblivious to the way her actions during the riot (throwing her arms around Thornton to protect him) would be interpreted. She's confident in her own abilities and short-sighted as to how this appears to others. Thornton makes an effort to believe the best about Margaret despite having seen her in this situation.

CHAPTER 34

Margaret is, in fact, under great strain. She grieves and waits in agony for further word from Frederick. A few days later, a police inspector comes and asks to speak to Margaret. The inspector tells Margaret that a man (Leonards) has died as a consequence of a fall at the train station the week before. A scuffle was rumored, and the inspector was told that Margaret witnessed it. She maintains a defiant look and tells the inspector, "with the unconscious look of a sleep-walker," that she was not there. She maintains her regal bearing until the inspector leaves the house, then goes into the study and swoons.

Margaret instinctively lies so as to protect Frederick, since she was no way of knowing whether he is safely out of England.

CHAPTER 35

Meanwhile, Mr. Hale and Thornton have a quiet and consoling chat that knits them more firmly together in friendship—Thornton, "man of action as he was…there was a deeper religion binding him to God in his heart, in spite of his strong willfulness."

Here, Gaskell portrays Thornton as having an interior piety that most people don't see.

Margaret slowly regains consciousness and thinks about what's happened. Lying to save Frederick is worth it, but she decides that if she receives assurance of his safety before the inspector inquires again, she will admit her guilt, no matter the shame.

For Margaret, the strain of lying is almost too much, and her integrity is such that she can't maintain the lie unless Frederick's life depends on it.

As Thornton leaves the Hales', he meets the police inspector, whom Thornton had helped to get his job. It turns out that Thornton had been the magistrate present at the dying railroad porter's drunken deposition the night before. The inspector explains that the man's death may have some connection with the Hale household. He asks for Thornton's advice, since Margaret seems to have been mixed up in a case of mistaken identity. Mr. Thornton instructs the inspector not to take any steps until they have spoken again.

Thornton is of such prominence in Milton that he has connections and is capable of exerting influence in this situation, but wants to take the time to think before he acts.

Thornton goes home and agonizes over the events—has Margaret behaved improperly or not? What kind of shameful secret might she be hiding? Finally, he comes to his decision; he will save Margaret; "he might despise her, but the woman whom he had once loved should be kept from shame."

Thornton can only speculate about the particulars of this case—and, having seen Margaret at the train station, he must assume she is lying to cover up something—but ultimately allows his love for Margaret to sway him toward a decision; perhaps an illustration of his "deeper religion of the heart."

Thornton sends a note to the police inspector: "There will be no inquest," since the dead man had a previous medical complaint, and the cause of his death is not conclusively attributed to the fall alone. Accordingly, the inspector returns to a miserable Margaret and informs her that there will be no further inquiry, thanks to Thornton.

Thornton uses his influence to protect Margaret's reputation. Even though there's a rift between them, he still loves her and wants to protect her reputation.

Margaret's relief is clouded by the realization that Thornton had seen her at the train station and now believes her "degraded"—"she suddenly found herself at his feet, and was strangely distressed at her fall." She shrinks from the realization that, deep down, she cares about Thornton's good opinion of her.

Margaret is perplexed by her confused feelings about Thornton. For all her disdain toward him, she now finds herself beholden to him.

The next morning, Margaret receives word from Frederick—he had been safely out of England, in fact, well before she had lied to protect him. Margaret reproaches herself for not having told the truth—a failure of her trust in God, she believes, resulting in this abasement before Thornton.

Margaret believes that, had she maintained her integrity and spoken the truth, God would have protected Frederick. Her current shame before Thornton is the consequence of lack of faith. Her confidence in her ability to act rightly according to her conscience has been shaken.

Margaret bears the burden of the entire incident herself. Because Mr. Hale is no longer a priest, Margaret doesn't know how her father might respond to her spiritual burdens. She must bear her secret and her "disgrace" alone.

Margaret again finds herself isolated. Not only must she bear her father's burdens, she must also bear her own in silence, since she doesn't know if they're on the same wavelength spiritually. Mr. Hale's dissent has consequences in their relationship.

CHAPTER 36

The next day, Margaret and Mr. Hale go to visit Higgins, who is still out of work. Higgins explains that his former employer, Hamper, makes his men pledge not to support the union with their wages; consequently, he doesn't know where he can expect to find work. Margaret asks him about Boucher's remark that the union is the worst tyrant of all. Higgins replies that the union does "force a man into his own good." Higgins is still angry at Boucher, because not only did he riot, but he went to Hamper's mill seeking work, despite knowing about the new rule. Margaret says that the union has made Boucher what he is, by driving him into the union against his will.

Higgins' views on the formation of character contrast curiously with those of Thornton, who maintains that employers can't shape their workers outside of working hours; the union, on the other hand, is a tool to force people "into their own good." Margaret believes that the tool is too blunt and backfires by bypassing persuasion of the will.

Just then, Margaret, Mr. Hale, and Higgins hear a steady tramping sound and look outside to see six men carrying a corpse on a door. They found the man drowned in the brook. It's John Boucher.

While the discovery of Boucher's suicide follows rather improbably on this conversation, Gaskell uses it to drive home Margaret's point about the use of force versus persuasion.

One of the men asks Higgins to break the news to Mrs. Boucher, but he refuses to face her. Margaret asks Mr. Hale to go, but he is trembling and can't think what to say. Margaret offers to go instead. At the Bouchers', Margaret finds a messy house filled with many children. Mrs. Boucher hasn't seen Mr. Boucher since he left four days ago in search of work. When she understands Margaret's message, she faints with grief. Mr. Hale and a kindly neighbor arrive to help tend to the children. They stop to speak to Higgins again on the way home, but he wants to be left alone.

As Margaret has been assuming spiritual leadership in her home, she now does so outside of her family circle—where Mr. Hale's role was once to speak truth and solace in public, Margaret now steps in voluntarily to do so.

CHAPTER 37

Margaret and Mr. Hale return the next day to check on the Bouchers. Margaret befriends and comforts some of the children, but Mr. Hale's efforts to console the widowed Mrs. Boucher are too "abstract" to be of comfort; she doesn't empathize with Boucher's misery and is fixated on how his death has affected her.

Though Mr. Hale makes an effort to relate to Mrs. Boucher, he struggles to relate to a working-class Milton woman, which seems to underscore his distance from his former role as a priest, as well as the fact that he has never acclimated to Milton as Margaret has.

As they return home, Margaret tries to encourage her father, saying that town life tends to depress people's spirits. Mr. Hale points out that the **country**, on the other hand, can itself have a stagnating effect on people's character. Margaret acknowledges that "each mode of life produces its own trials and its own temptations."

Margaret now has a more nuanced view of North versus South than she did at the beginning of the story, when she felt nothing but disgust for what she knew secondhand. Firsthand knowledge has broadened her view and tempered her nostalgia.

Margaret's thoughts return to Thornton and her disgrace in his eyes. She feels strangely disappointed when Thornton doesn't appear for an expected lesson that evening. Instead, a subdued Higgins shows up, to Dixon's disgust: "Why master and you must always be asking the lower classes upstairs, since we came to Milton, I cannot understand."

Dixon's annoyance points to the fact that the Hales' social circle has changed dramatically since they moved to Milton. They're still members of the gentility, but they extend hospitality to a broader array of people; Mr. Hale and Margaret both used to be much more particular about the background and profession of those they associated with.

Higgins explains to Mr. Hale that he's been seeking work for the sake of Boucher's widow and children. "I reckon," he explains, "I would ha guided Boucher to a better end; but I set him off o' th' road, and so I mun answer for him." Higgins asks Mr. Hale if he might help him find work in the South.

Higgins believes he's failed in his duty to influence Boucher in a better direction; the union's force didn't work, and he wants to take responsibility for the consequences. This is another example of personal relationship shifting one's perspective.

Margaret interjects that Higgins would be miserable in the agricultural South—the labor would be too much for a man in his mid-forties, and he couldn't get manufacturing wages. Moreover, a man like Higgins couldn't bear the stagnant lifestyle of the South, Mr. Hale tells him—"The hard spade-work robs their brain of life; the sameness of their toil deadens their imagination; they don't care to meet to talk over thoughts and speculations…they go home brutishly tired, poor creatures!"

The differences the Hales describe between North and South underscore the changes that industrialization has brought to England. And their view of the South is less biased now; they acknowledge that it's not ideal for everyone, and in fact, its working poor lack the vitality and active minds of a man like Higgins.

Higgins realizes the Hales are right that the South isn't a utopia—"North an' South have each getten their own troubles…For sure, th' world is in a confusion that passes me or any other man to understand; it needs fettling, and who's to fettle it, if it's as yon folks say, and there's nought but what we see?"

Higgins, who once scorned the South but has humbled himself to seek work there, admits that no place is free of troubles, and also modifies his old matter-of-fact view of the world—there are problems that can't be fixed simply by dealing with the world as one finds it.

Margaret asks Higgins if he would consider asking Thornton for work. Higgins says it would "tax [his] pride," and he wouldn't do it for just anyone's sake, but he'll do it for Margaret's. He will stand guard at the entrance of Marlborough Mills all day until Thornton talks with him. After Higgins leaves, Mr. Hale observes that Higgins admires the part of Thornton that is most like himself—his stubbornness.

Higgins' willingness to sacrifice his pride for the sake of providing for the Boucher children shows his good heart, and the degree to which his interaction with Margaret has softened him toward Boucher's suffering.

Margaret says that if only Higgins would speak to Thornton as he does to them, and if only Thornton would listen "with his human heart, not with his master's ears," the two might come to an understanding. Mr. Hale teases Margaret that she's finally doing justice to Thornton, which gives Margaret a pang of conscience. She thinks, "I wish I were a man, that I could go and force him to express his disapprobation…It seems hard to lose him as a friend just when I had begun to feel his value."

As before, Margaret is sure that face-to-face interaction would break down many of the barriers that prevent members of different classes from understanding each other. Also, because of Victorian views of propriety, even forthright Margaret doesn't feel comfortable seeking out a private conversation with Thornton to defend her own virtue.

CHAPTER 38

What Margaret doesn't know is that Thornton's change of opinion about her is not just due to the fact that she lied, but that this lie is associated in his mind with some mysterious other lover, concerning whom Margaret evidently feels guilt. "The very falsehood that stained her, was a proof how blindly she loved another—this dark, slight, elegant, handsome man—while he himself was rough, and stern, and strongly made. He lashed himself into an agony of fierce jealousy."

Since the reader knows that the mysterious "lover" is actually Frederick, there is an element of humor to Thornton's thinking, and it shows how infatuated with Margaret he still is.

Mrs. Thornton has heard about Margaret's presence at the train station scuffle. She believes that Margaret has led Thornton on by pretending to be fond of him, only to play him off against the unknown younger man with whom she was seen at the station. Thornton tells his mother that he believes Margaret to be in some sort of difficulty connected with this man, and she may be in need of Mrs. Thornton's "womanly counsel."

Mrs. Thornton already has a low opinion of Margaret, so she needs little encouragement to confront Margaret for (as she thinks) treating her son so shamefully.

Mrs. Thornton feels more bitter than ever towards Margaret. She even feels "a savage pleasure" at the idea of speaking to her "in the guise of a fulfillment of a duty [to Mrs. Hale]." She wants to show herself capable of resisting the "glamour" she believes Margaret throws over others.

Mrs. Thornton displays a cruel streak in her readiness to abuse Mrs. Hale's trust in her by confronting Margaret in this way.

When Mrs. Thornton arrives at the Hales', Margaret has just finished relating Mrs. Hale's last days in a letter to Edith and is in a softened mood. Mrs. Thornton is thrown off by this—"her sharp Damascus blade seemed out of place, and useless among rose-leaves." She nevertheless convinces herself that Margaret is trying to manipulate her good opinion and steels herself to follow through. She explains her promise to Mrs. Hale to speak to Margaret in the event that she acts wrongly. Margaret thinks that Thornton must have sent his mother to warn Margaret about the dangers she's exposed herself to by lying.

Mrs. Thornton is prepared to believe the worst about Margaret, based on rumor and her own persistent assumptions about Margaret.

Instead, Mrs. Thornton speaks of the "indiscretion" of walking after dark with a young man. Margaret immediately turns combative. She says that Mrs. Hale didn't mean for her to be exposed to insults like this. As Mrs. Thornton continues to speak of Margaret's "compromising" herself, Margaret declines to attempt to justify herself further and excuses herself "with the noiseless grace of an offended princess."

Margaret refuses to hear Mrs. Thornton's insults and makes it clear that Mrs. Thornton has overstepped the bounds intended by Mrs. Hale.

Meanwhile, Higgins keeps his promise to Margaret, waiting for hours to speak to Thornton. Thornton's business is running behind because of disruptions related to the strike, and he is not in a good mood. The mill's overlooker reminds Thornton that Higgins is known as "a turbulent spirit," so he sees Higgins as the sort of troublemaker who has upset his business. He denies Higgins a job and won't believe his story about supporting the orphaned children. But as he watches Higgins leave, he can't help feeling impressed when he hears how long Higgins stood there waiting.

Thornton, like his mother, is willing enough to act on assumption and rumor; and yet, he's open to reconsidering when he hears how patiently Higgins has waited for an audience with him.

CHAPTER 39

As Margaret goes over her conversation with Mrs. Thornton, she is distressed all over again to realize that Thornton must believe Frederick to have been her lover. She thinks about how miserable the past year has been, and how she's been prematurely thrust into old age: "I anticipate cares and sorrows just as if I were an old woman, and with the same fearful spirit. I am weary of this continual call upon me for strength."

Margaret's maturation since she moved to Thornton has not been without great cost. Rather than stoically accepting all that has been demanded of her, as might be expected of a Victorian heroine, Gaskell has her admit—even if only to herself—the heavy burden she's carried.

Later Margaret visits Higgins and finds him playing with some of the Boucher children; he describes his unsatisfactory conversation with Thornton but repeats that he would "break stones on the road" before he'll allow these children to starve. Margaret says she is disappointed in Thornton. Just then, Mr. Thornton walks in. Margaret flees, mortified.

Higgins has resolved to care for the Boucher children, no matter what it costs him. Meanwhile, Margaret has a completely unexpected encounter with Thornton; he seems completely out of context in these surroundings.

Thornton is equally uncomfortable at unexpectedly seeing Margaret. He has come to Higgins because he believes he behaved unjustly toward Higgins the day before, especially upon hearing that Higgins had waited five hours to see him; Thornton had subsequently taken the time to investigate Higgins' character and story and found his words to be true. He is so impressed by Higgins' generosity toward the Boucher children that it "[touches] the latent tenderness of his heart…[and makes] him forget entirely the mere reasonings of justice, and overleap them by a diviner instinct."

Thornton takes times and goes to considerable lengths to follow up on Higgins's claims, showing that his character is not prejudiced like his mother's, and far more tender-hearted. His showing up in person in the Higgins' neighborhood shows how far he is willing to go, even across class lines, to correct his mistake.

Higgins speaks fiercely to Thornton at first, but Thornton says that he has spoken as he had no right to do, and that he could not have acted as generously toward the children of a man who'd acted as Boucher did. He begs Higgins' pardon. He asks Higgins if he will work at the mill, and they shake on it.

Thornton shows Higgins a humble, classy attitude, not only granting him his request for work, but actively inviting him to work for him.

Thornton follows Margaret when he sees her coming out of the Bouchers' house. He tells her about his hiring of Higgins, and asks whether she has any explanations of her own to give him. Though strangely tempted to do so, she can think of nothing to say that doesn't threaten her loyalty to Frederick. Thornton promises that her "secret" is safe with him and says that he's no longer interested in pursuing her. Margaret wonders why he goes to such pains to tell her that she's nothing to him.

Thornton seems to think that his own act of honesty might prompt Margaret to respond in kind. However, Margaret's loyalty to Frederick is unshakable.

Back at home, Margaret receives a letter from Edith mentioning that the Lennoxes might move back to Harley Street. Unable to escape from hearing about Thornton or from her own confusing feelings, she finds herself yearning for the "placid tranquility of that old well-ordered, monotonous life."

Overwhelmed by the grief and drama of life in Milton, Margaret looks back on Harley Street with nostalgia, although she doesn't account for the fact that she has changed since she last lived that "monotonous" life.

CHAPTER 40

Mr. Bell comes to Milton for a visit, and Margaret easily renews a warm and teasing friendship with her godfather—when Margaret teases him about his musty old opinions, he declares that Milton has turned her into "a red republican, a member of the Peace Society, a socialist…"

The term "red republican" is likely a reference to a British socialist newspaper of the 1850s, and the Peace Society was a pacifist organization that overlapped with the same era. Though he's teasing, Bell observes that Margaret's new environment has genuinely impacted her outlook.

Comparing the leisured study of Oxford with the bustle of Milton, Mr. Bell says that he doesn't believe "there's a man in Milton who knows how to sit still; and it is a great art." Mr. Hale returns that Milton folks don't think that Oxford men know how to move; "it would be a very good thing if they mixed a little more."

Now that the Hales have befriended Milton folks of various class backgrounds, they have a more realistic view of the strengths and weaknesses of various modes of life, and what can be gained by learning from others. Much prejudice, Mr. Hale implies, comes of not *mixing enough.*

Thornton procrastinates about coming to the Hales' and conducting business with his landlord, Bell, because he's reluctant to see Margaret. Finally, however, Thornton and Bell join the Hales, where Mr. Hale renews that morning's discussion of Oxford versus Milton. Mr. Bell jumps in by asking Thornton "when you Milton men intend to live. All your lives seem to be spent in gathering together the materials for life"—that is, money. Thornton responds that money is not what he strives for, but is uncomfortable when Bell presses him to elaborate; Thornton calls it "a home question."

Bell, from the perspective of one who's led a sheltered Oxford life, suggests that Milton life lends itself to commercial success but not to actual enjoyment of life. By "a home question" Thornton means that Bell's line of questioning is too personal for comfort.

Thornton is irritated by Bell's playful tone. He argues that "we are a different race from the Greeks, to whom beauty was everything…I belong to Teutonic blood…we do not look upon life as a time for enjoyment, but as a time for action and exertion. Our glory and our beauty arise out of our inward strength, which makes us victorious over material resistance, and over greater difficulties still."

While Bell is interested in amusing give-and-take, Thornton takes the discussion with utmost seriousness—a good reflection of their respective personalities. Here, Thornton draws on his classical studies with Hale to engage with Bell. He argues that life is ultimately about conquering obstacles and not about enjoying one's surroundings at leisure, attributing this bias to his Anglo-Saxon roots.

In response, Bell jokes that Milton men do, in fact, reverence the past; they are "regular worshippers of Thor." Thornton replies that Milton men think differently about the past than Oxford scholars do: "to men groping in new circumstances, it would be finer if the words of experience [from history] could direct us how to act in what concerns us most intimately and immediately…People can speak of Utopia much more easily than of the next day's duty; and yet when that duty is all done by others, who so ready to cry, 'Fie, for shame!'"

With his joke about Thor, a pagan Germanic god who wielded a hammer, Bell refers to the Milton manufacturer's obsession with conquering the material world by his own strength. Thornton doesn't rise to this bait, but argues that the insights of history should serve the problems of the present day; it's easy to theorize about an imagined future, he argues, and much harder to work to bring about the future; people who limit themselves to the former are all too ready to judge those who venture the latter.

Later that evening, when Bell comments on Thornton's irritability and lack of humor, Margaret comes to his defense, saying Thornton wasn't himself. Later, Bell asks Mr. Hale if Margaret and Thornton have feelings for each other. Mr. Hale is flustered by the thought.

Bell, seeing their interaction with fresh eyes, picks up on the dynamic between Thornton and Margaret more easily than the somewhat oblivious Hale.

The winter passes monotonously after Bell's visit. Higgins works steadily for Thornton, commenting to the Hales that Thornton is like "two chaps"—one the master of industry, the other not the least master-like, and Higgins can't reconcile the two. But Thornton visits Higgins often and listens to him—"sits and listens and stares, as if I were some strange beast newly caught…Sometimes he says a rough thing or two, which is not agreeable to look at at first, but has a queer smack o' truth in it when yo' come to chew it."

Like Margaret, Higgins struggles to make sense of the harsh and tender sides of Thornton's personality. The two men are genuinely seeking to learn from one another, despite Higgins' "strangeness" to Thornton and Thornton's disagreeable flavor to Higgins.

Thornton, meanwhile, seldom visits the Hales anymore, to Mr. Hale's regret. One evening he abruptly asks Margaret if she has ever thought that Thornton cared for her. Margaret admits the truth, but quickly changes the subject to mask her emotion.

Margaret finds it difficult to confide in her father nowadays, especially on a matter as complicated and sensitive as her relationship with Thornton.

CHAPTER 41

The winter continues drearily; Margaret's "mind had lost its elasticity," and she finds no heartfelt joy in anything but caring for Mr. Hale. In March they receive word of Frederick's marriage to Dolores; he has settled in an excellent position working in Dolores' family's trading-house in Spain. Henry Lennox has investigated Frederick's case and found little hope of clearing his name in the absence of witnesses, upon which Frederick declares to Margaret that England is no longer his country.

Margaret is depressed from the trauma of the past year. Frederick has essentially defected—an example, like Mr. Hale's abandonment of his living, of the cost of abiding by conscience—which leaves Margaret ever lonelier, as her family continues to unravel.

Mr. Bell invites both Mr. Hale and Margaret for a visit to Oxford. Mr. Hale, whose health has faltered from stress and too little company, goes, but Margaret insists on staying at home, wanting to enjoy rest and freedom from responsibilities for the first time in two years. As soon as her father leaves, Margaret feels "how great and long had been the pressure on her time and her spirits. It was astonishing, almost stunning, to feel herself so much at liberty…she might be unhappy if she liked." She uses the time to go over the griefs of recent months at leisure, "[appointing] to each of them its right work in her life."

Margaret finally enjoys a break from the relentless responsibilities of her role within the household. Gaskell again underlines the personal cost of Margaret's work; she has continually sacrificed her own emotions to the wellbeing of others. Now, at last, she has the luxury of examining her grief—but even now, she doesn't wallow in it, but considers how it might serve her development as a person.

Margaret feels most keenly the lie she told, especially in light of the dashing of her hopes for Frederick's exoneration, and the events to which her lie gave rise. She reads a passage from St. Francis de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life* encouraging the repentant heart to take courage on the path of humility. She tries to become less absorbed in her own problems, beginning by chatting with Martha, her serving-maid, who reports that Fanny Thornton is soon to be married to a rich manufacturer.

Margaret's character has always been marked by pride, but she begins to emphasize the cultivation of humility as well. Her experiences with Thornton have made her increasingly mindful of her weaknesses.


Margaret visits Higgins next, who reports that his new master, Thornton, is "good enough to fight wi', but too good…to be cheated." He has one of the Boucher boys recite some Methodist hymns for Margaret, "oddly and unconsciously [taking] an interest in the sacred things which he had formerly scouted [rejected with scorn]."

Higgins has come to respect Thornton, especially in the stubborn devotion to principle they share. Also, in contrast to his former scorn of "methodee fancies," he encourages his adoptive sons to memorize sacred Methodist music—perhaps touched by those things that had meant so much to Bessy.


That night, Margaret is strangely preoccupied with thoughts of her father. Mr. Hale is thinking of Margaret as well. The renewal of old acquaintances in Oxford has wearied him. With sudden earnestness, he tells Bell that, even if he could have foreseen what would come of his changed opinion—including Mrs. Hale's death—he could not have done otherwise. He might have acted more wisely in the aftermath; but, he concludes, "I don't think God endued me with over-much wisdom or strength."

Mr. Hale continues to maintain that he did the right thing by acting according to his conscience. Even though Mr. Hale has displayed weakness on plenty of occasions in the story—something he acknowledges himself—he remains steadfast in his conviction, despite the hardships he thrust himself and his family into. Gaskell upholds this devotion to conscience as something to be respected.

Mr. Bell replies, "[God] gave you strength to do what your conscience told you was right; and I don't see that we need any higher or holier strength than that; or wisdom either." He adds, "The veriest idiot who obeys his own simple law of right, if it be but in wiping his shoes on a door-mat, is wiser and stronger than I."

Mr. Bell reaffirms the sanctity of conscience that is so important to Gaskell. He also upholds the wisdom of the common man as potentially superior to the education of a man like himself.


Before going to bed that night, Mr. Hale commends Margaret to Mr. Bell's care, and Bell promises all possible help to his beloved goddaughter. That night, Mr. Hale dies peacefully in his sleep. Shocked, Bell laments that his friend "wore out that tender heart of [his] before its time," and hurriedly departs for Milton to tell Margaret.

Mr. Hale's death severs Margaret's last link with her family. While she's felt increasingly isolated over the years, now she is truly alone and must fend for herself.

On the train, Bell unexpectedly sees Thornton. Thornton is silent with shock at the news of Mr. Hale's death and wonders, trembling, what will become of Margaret. Mr. Bell assumes that the Lennoxes, especially Henry, will take an interest in Margaret. Thornton hides behind his newspaper again. In Milton, as soon as Margaret sees Mr. Bell getting out of a carriage alone, she knows "with an instinctive flash" that her father has died.

Thornton is unhappy at the thought that Hale's death might mean Margaret's renewed intimacy with another man. Margaret realizes that she is truly alone.

CHAPTER 42

Margaret falls into a state of physical exhaustion from the shock of Mr. Hale's death. Dixon and Mr. Bell discuss what's to be done about Margaret and decide to write to Aunt Shaw, commanding the indecisive woman rather sharply to come to her niece at once. Edith begs Aunt Shaw to bring Margaret home with her to London. Henry Lennox pretends indifference at the possibility of Margaret's coming.

After years of steadfastly caring for those around her, it's not surprising that Margaret would be overwhelmed by the sudden void in her life. Meanwhile, instead of Margaret making decisions for others, others are making decisions about her future.

Aunt Shaw journeys to "that horrid place," Milton, to retrieve Margaret. Margaret finally finds the relief of tears on her aunt's shoulder. Thornton inquires at the house, without seeing Margaret, and invites Mr. Bell to stay with him. Bell tells Thornton that Margaret wishes to quickly leave the place "where she had suffered so much." Thornton makes no response to this. He thinks that Margaret's eighteen months in Milton "had been a royal time of luxury to him, with all [their] stings…compared to the poverty that crept round and clipped the anticipation of the future down to sordid fact."

Always occupied with the demands of the present, Thornton has found that Margaret has an elevating effect upon his character, and the potential loss of that is devastating for him.

As Bell, Thornton, and Mrs. Thornton chat at the Thorntons' house, Bell makes a passing reference to Frederick, startling Thornton. Bell explains Frederick's identity to the puzzled Thornton, but, not knowing about Frederick's secret visit to England, assumes that Margaret's male companion at the train station must have been Henry Lennox. Mr. Bell makes some light remarks about the attachment he fancies having seen between Thornton and Margaret, but Thornton sternly changes the subject.

This is another instance in the story where the lack of sufficient information causes problems—it's dramatic irony for the reader, because Thornton is tantalizingly close to finding out the truth about the incident at the train station, but it's not enough. Gaskell is underscoring the fragility of a woman's reputation in the Victorian context.

Thornton talks about his acquaintance with Higgins—"a strange kind of chap"—and the brainstorm Thornton had to start a dining-room for his workers. He sought Higgins' advice, who initially rejected the plan, only to return with his own, improved version, which Thornton, though initially ruffled, coolly put into practice. In time, Thornton has begun to share meals and conversation with his workers from time to time. He remarks that "I am really getting to know some of them now, and they talk pretty freely before me."

The picture of the equally stubborn Thornton and Higgins partnering on such a project is humorous, but the outcome shows that Margaret's instinct about face-to-face interaction overcoming class divisions was correct—and that Thornton took her advice to heart.

CHAPTER 43

Aunt Shaw is appalled by Milton and prevails upon a heartsick Margaret to return home with her as soon as possible. Mr. Bell, back in Oxford, sends her an affectionate letter assuring her of his provision for her needs and her status as his heiress, although she will be living with the Shaws. The day before they're to leave, Margaret insists on visiting her friends, and Aunt Shaw won't let her go unchaperoned.

Aunt Shaw's interference is humorous to the reader, but jarring, after the independence Margaret has developed over her time in Milton. Aunt Shaw's notions of propriety have stood still, while Margaret's have evolved in response to her environment.

Margaret first bids Mary Higgins a tearful goodbye, taking with her a drinking-cup to remind her of Bessy. Then she reluctantly visits Mrs. Thornton, who shows greater warmth now that Margaret is leaving, and apologizes for her manner the last time they spoke. As Thornton says goodbye to Margaret, he can't help thinking about the last time they stood together on his door-step (the riot), but his tone is emotionless, and he then disappears, "busily engaged" for the rest of the day. Higgins stops by that evening to bid Margaret a warm farewell, and she gives him Mr. Hale's Bible.

Margaret's goodbye to each of her acquaintances is in keeping with the relationship during their time in Milton—her care of Bessy, the coldness of Mrs. Thornton, and the initially guarded but increasingly warm and intimate conversations with Higgins.

CHAPTER 44

At Harley Street, where "the machinery of daily life [was] well oiled," Margaret has leisure to reflect on the sudden changes in her life. Aunt Shaw and Edith pamper her, and she gradually resumes her old role of tending to Edith's needs. In the midst of London's social whirl, however, it isn't long before Margaret feels "surfeited of the eventless ease in which no struggle or endeavor was required." She never sees members of the lower classes, or even the servants, and worries that she'll forget anything outside of this luxurious life.

Life in London picks up much where it left off, but Margaret has changed significantly. Struggle, and sensitivity to others' struggles, has become part of her, and in its absence, she feels dissatisfied. She also feels the absence of friends from other stations in life, from whom she is curiously insulated in the Shaws' household.

Mr. Bell and Henry Lennox pay a visit to Margaret, and they chat about Henry's attempt to find supporting witnesses for the case to clear Frederick's name. As Mr. Bell walks out with Henry Lennox, they chat about the Hales' family difficulties in recent years. Lennox remarks that he has heard from Mr. Hale's successor—"a thoroughly active clergyman"—that there was no need for Mr. Hale to have given up his living and left Helstone. But, he says, "these country clergymen live such isolated lives…that they are very apt to disturb themselves with imaginary doubts as to the articles of faith." Mr. Bell chafes at Lennox's characterization of his friend.

Margaret's earlier instinct that Henry wouldn't have understood her father's crisis of conscience proves correct—he characterizes Mr. Hale as too contemplative to be useful, and he misses the significance of Hale's difficult act.

CHAPTER 45

Mr. Bell has a nostalgic dream about the joys of visiting newlywed Mr. Hale and Mrs. Hale in Helstone. He joins Henry Lennox and Margaret to go over the details of Frederick's case, which is not strong enough to pursue further, especially now that Frederick is happily settled in Spain. Margaret sadly remarks that her brother "is lost to me, and I am so lonely." Later, Mr. Bell invites Margaret to join him for a trip to Helstone the next day, which she gratefully accepts.

Margaret's family circle is conclusively broken now; Frederick has started his own family, loyal to a different country and a different faith, and it doesn't contain a clear place for Margaret. Before Margaret can make decisions about pursuing her own way, Gaskell inserts a Helstone interlude that draws together Margaret's past with her present and future.

CHAPTER 46

As Mr. Bell and Margaret journey toward Helstone the next day, Margaret finds that "every mile was redolent of associations," as she'd last traveled this road in the company of her parents. While so much has changed for her, "**nature** felt no change, and was ever young."

The journey toward Helstone hints at the complex nature of memory and change. Nature—a reliable refuge for Margaret in the past—has continued to go on as before, yet every sight summons memories of what has been lost to her forever.

As Mr. Bell and Margaret settle at the inn in Helstone, the landlady chats with Margaret about the Hepworths, the new occupants of the Helstone parsonage. The new rector and his wife are teetotalers (people who don't drink alcohol) and "are stirring people, and have done a deal of good; at least they say it's doing good; if it were not, I should call it turning things upside down for very little purpose."

Gaskell sets up the Hepworths in contrast to the Hales—the Hepworths are "doers" where Mr. Hale, by contrast, was a "thinker." But, if Mr. Hale could overdo his thinking at times, it's implied that the Hepworths go overboard in their initiatives, too.

Margaret and Mr. Bell begin their exploration of Helstone, and Margaret grieves over cottages that have been torn down in recent years. Mr. Bell tells Margaret that it's "the first changes among familiar things that make such a mystery of time to the young…the instability of all human things is familiar to me, to you it is new and oppressive."

The same sights that had once "reproached" Margaret for failing to capture them have since disappeared. Their disappearance symbolizes the disappearance of the younger, more innocent Margaret, too.

Margaret goes to visit Susan, a young girl she had been especially close to, and talks with Susan's widowed mother. The widow tells her that a neighbor has stolen and burnt her cat, meant to compel the powers of darkness to fulfill her wishes. Margaret walks away heartsick at this "savage **country** superstition"; even the "soft green influence [of Helstone] could not charm away" her pain.

In a far more shocking way than before, Margaret realizes that the country is not all beauty and refuge—it's touched by cruelty, ignorance, and death, just as Milton is. The younger Margaret seems to have been blind to this fact. She realizes that her nostalgia doesn't tell her the full truth.

After a melancholy visit to the village school, Margaret reluctantly accepts an invitation to the parsonage, though she dreads seeing the "improvements" that have been made. The place is so changed, especially by happy signs of children, that it pains her less than she expects. Mr. Hale's old study is the only room in the parsonage to remain relatively unchanged, where "the green gloom and delicious quiet of the place had conduced…perhaps, in some degree to the formation of a character more fitted for thought than action." There is a new window in the study, from which Mr. Hepworth, "even during the composition of his most orthodox sermons," can spot his parishioners making their way to the local alehouse.

The contrast between Hale and Hepworth is amusing; where Hale had perhaps been too enclosed with his own thoughts, Hepworth (who is, by implication, at no risk of becoming a Dissenter), is only too likely to get involved in his parishioners' lives. There is such a thing, Gaskell suggests, as being too *attuned to the issues of the moment.*

By that evening, Margaret is too tired for the forest rambles she'd planned, and finds that the visit hasn't been quite what she expected. Though many alterations in the town are deemed improvements, "Margaret sighed over the old picturesqueness, the old gloom, and the grassy wayside of former days."

The romanticized picture of Helstone that Margaret has clung to has not matched up to reality, and the so-called "improvements" detract from her cherished memories.

As they have tea back at the inn that evening, Margaret brings up the subject of Frederick and confesses to Mr. Bell that she's told a lie. Margaret spills out the whole story of Frederick and Leonards at the train station, and her subsequent lie to the police inspector. She explains that in her haste to protect Frederick, she gave Thornton reason to suspect ill of her. She begs Mr. Bell to speak to Thornton about it, if he should have the opportunity, so that she might regain Thornton's respect.

Mr. Bell is the only person who can readily intercede for Margaret in this matter, the only link between Margaret's Southern life and her Northern life, and the only confidant Margaret has left. In keeping with her newfound emphasis on humility, Margaret confides in him.

As Margaret sits up late that night, she is "overpowered" by "a sense of change, of individual nothingness, of perplexity and disappointment." She is weary of "being whirled on through all these phases of my life, in which nothing abides by me, no creature, no place."

Again, Margaret is humbled by the change around her and the insignificance it makes her feel. There has been no stability for her in life, no place or person upon whom she can wholly depend—including herself.

The next morning, however, Margaret wakes with a refreshed outlook, as "looking out of myself, and my own painful sense of change" adjusts her perspective. Before they depart from Helstone, Margaret sneaks behind the vicarage and gathers a piece of honeysuckle. She finds that Helstone has been "reinvested with the old enchanting atmosphere."

Taking a broader, less self-centered view enables Margaret to appreciate Helstone's changes for their benefits on others, and some of the Helstone magic comes back.

Margaret realizes that she constantly changes, too, and that after her irritability at finding things different from what she had wished, she finds Helstone even more beautiful than her memories. Nevertheless, she decides that the old associations are too strong; future visits would be too painful.

Margaret sets aside nostalgia, as she realizes, in light of her own ongoing changes, that it doesn't tell her the truth about reality.

CHAPTER 47

Dixon returns from Milton and takes her place in the Shaws' household as Margaret's maid. Margaret enjoys having someone with whom to discuss Milton people and events. In the meantime, Margaret passes her time caring for little Sholto Lennox, renewing a comfortable friendship with Henry Lennox, and looking forward to a possible trip to Spain with Mr. Bell to visit Frederick.

Visiting Helstone seems to have been healing for Margaret, and she begins to find ways of cultivating friendships and making herself of use in London.

CHAPTER 48

Margaret continues to wearily endure the Lennoxes' superficial dinner-parties. She continues to hope for news that Mr. Bell has gone to Milton and spoken to Mr. Thornton, and that the trip to Spain might yet happen. Finally, she receives a letter announcing Bell's impending visit to London, mentioning his intention to see a doctor there. However, the visit is deferred, and Margaret soon receives a letter from his servant explaining that Bell has suffered an apoplectic fit and isn't expected to survive the night.

Just when Margaret has hope of a diversion from the tedium of London life, her last living link with her former life (besides Dixon) is suddenly taken from her.

Edith weeps bitterly at coming into indirect contact with someone who might soon be dead. She finally remembers Margaret and finds her cousin packing for the train to Oxford. Aunt Shaw becomes hysterical at the suddenness of it all, and Margaret misses the train. Because Margaret insists—"she was surprised herself at the firmness with which she asserted something of her right to independence of action"—she catches the following train, chaperoned by Captain Lennox.

The contrast between the Shaws and Margaret couldn't be greater—the Shaws react in stereotypically feminine ways to the proximity to death, while—as she has done so many times before—Margaret immediately acts. She is hampered by her relatives' Southern upper-class mindset about the propriety of women traveling independently.

Margaret is thankful to have made the journey to Oxford, though she learns on arrival that Mr. Bell had died in the night. On the way home, she weeps over her "fatal year," for "no sooner was she fully aware of one loss than another came—not to supersede her grief for the one before, but to re-open wounds and feelings scarcely healed."

Margaret's reflections on the trauma of successive deaths have a striking realism—grief doesn't function in a linear, predictable way, especially when one grief is quickly compounded by another.

That night, as Margaret sits in her childhood nursery, she remembers her childhood promise "to live as brave and noble a life as any heroine she ever read or heard of in romance…it had seemed to her then that she had only to will, and such a life would be accomplished." She now understands that prayer is necessary in addition to will.

Though Margaret has many times exercised her strong will in admirable ways, she has faced her weaknesses as well, and discovered that heroism isn't something that can be achieved through a simple act of will. Life is not a romantic story.

CHAPTER 49

Margaret soon learns that she has inherited about 40,000 pounds from Mr. Bell. Henry Lennox becomes her legal adviser and happily teaches her the relevant "mysteries of the law." Edith teases her brother-in-law that she hopes their conversations will lead to matrimony, but Henry tells her not to meddle, as Margaret has only begun to "thaw a little from her Zenobia ways."

Zenobia was a third-century queen and empress of the Eastern Roman empire. Henry refers to Margaret's dignified independence; he hopes that Margaret is, little by little, becoming more dependent upon him.

Margaret still hopes for a way to meet Frederick on the Continent, but agrees to join the Shaws at Cromer (a coastal town northeast of London) instead. Her heart continues to ache over the unresolved issue between herself and Thornton, but she assumes it is too late to be fixed. She finally sets this anxiety aside, ready to turn "with all her heart and strength to the life that lay immediately before her." Margaret sits day after day on the beach, "[putting] events in their right places" and gradually feeling more and more restored. Henry Lennox says that she looks "like the Margaret Hale of Helstone."

Margaret finally allows herself to set aside the burdens of the past and live with resolve for the future. Henry's comment is somewhat ironic, given that Margaret is not *the idealistic teenager of Helstone; but it's true that she is finally able to shed the untimely burdens that have weighted her youth and begin to dream of a future wholly her own.*

Henry Lennox becomes determined to woo Margaret once again. He admires her mind and character and assumes he could win her over to share his own hopes and goals. As her legal adviser, he is also aware of her wealth and Milton properties and knows they would enable him, "the poor barrister," to rise significantly in the world. He shares her admiration for Milton and its people, and they often spend time in animated conversation about it.

While Gaskell portrays Henry as having genuine affection for Margaret as a person, Henry clearly assumes that Margaret will subordinate her desires to his—and gladly place her wealth at his disposal.

After returning from the seaside, Margaret "[takes] her life into her own hands" and begins to act independently of Aunt Shaw's constricting rules. She decided she must try to "settle that most difficult problem for women"—the balance between obedience and freedom. She charms her aunt into acknowledging "her right to follow her own ideas of duty."

As a single woman and heiress, Margaret is able to set her own path more readily than many of her peers would. Gaskell doesn't describe Margaret's goals for her life, but it's implied that she works among the poor of London.

CHAPTER 50

Things are gloomy in Milton. Due to speculative financial ventures, some Milton businesses face the prospect of failure. Even Thornton is "hard pressed." He has aspired to make a name for himself internationally, but like many who do so, he is "alive to distant, and dead to near things."

Thornton's lofty aspirations for his business have gotten away from him and blinded him to actual circumstances in Milton.

Until Thornton got to know Higgins, he and his fellow townsmen and factory workers have led parallel lives, "very close, but never touching." But "once brought face to face, man to man, with an individual of the masses around him, and…out of the character of master and workman…they had each begun to recognize" their shared humanity. He has begun to value his position as manufacturer because of the contact it affords him with his people.

Thornton has begun to think much as Margaret argued that he should—valuing the chance to influence the human beings around him, paying attention to their individual needs rather than regarding them in the abstract.

Thornton's business has been damaged by the strike and by the fact that much of his capital is in new, expensive machinery. Thornton at first is inclined to resent Higgins for his role in the strike, but the more they, along with Thornton's other men, get to know one another, the more they're able "to look upon each other with far more charity and sympathy." Soon Thornton is in real trouble, as his stocks fall to nearly half their value, and no new orders come in, and he has to borrow at high interest.

Whereas once Thornton would have been inclined to look on Higgins as simply a trouble-maker, he is now coming to genuinely understand his perspective, and Higgins no longer wishes ill on Thornton in his struggles. There is no longer active antagonism between master and workers.

One day Higgins asks Thornton whether he's heard anything of Margaret recently and notices how Thornton's face lights up at the mention of her. Then, with a confidential air, Higgins asks whether Frederick's name has been cleared, having heard the details from Mary while she was working temporarily in the Hale house. Thornton is relieved to know the truth of the young man's identity.

Margaret's newly cleared name in Thornton's eyes comes about not through Mr. Bell's formal intercession, but through an unlooked-for source, helped by Higgins' friendship with Margaret and now with Thornton.

One morning, after a sleepless night poring over his books, Thornton unburdens himself to Mrs. Thornton, explaining that he no longer dreads any outcome for his struggling business, because he now knows "that no man will suffer by me." He must give up his business, but he will be able to pay everyone what they are owed. A risky speculation has been offered to him by Fanny's husband, Watson, which could make him rich but would destroy his conscience. Mrs. Thornton is grieved at the thought that her son might lose his name, but he explains that he will "be always the same John Thornton in whatever circumstances; endeavoring to do right," though it is hard to have discovered "new powers…too late." He tries to help Mrs. Thornton reconcile herself to his failure and the loss of his "rightful place."

Thornton's good character is fully revealed here, as he cares not primarily for his own reputation, but for the fates of those who work alongside and beneath him. He will not be like his father, indulging in wild speculations to save his own skin (and ultimately coming to disgrace for it). Mrs. Thornton is far less reconciled to her son's newfound priorities, but for him, his character—his "manliness"—is more important than aspiring to a certain class status (a "gentleman").

Thornton at last has to give up his business. His brother-in-law Watson's speculation succeeds spectacularly, and Watson is widely admired for his foresight.

Thornton is humbled in the eyes of the world, while his brother-in-law—for now—seems much the wiser one.

CHAPTER 51

One summer evening at Harley Street, Edith, looking for Margaret, complains to Dixon that "I'm always expecting to hear of her having met with something horrible among all those wretched places she pokes herself into…They're not fit for ladies."

Margaret has apparently carried on with her independent plans among the poor, to her relatives' chagrin.

When Margaret comes in, Edith informs her that Henry has invited Thornton to dinner. Margaret tries to get out of the dinner-party, but Edith insists that she's needed to keep the conversation going with Mr. Colthurst, a visiting member of parliament. Henry explains to Margaret that Thornton has failed and needs to sublet Marlborough Mills. It's the first time in more than a year that Margaret and Thornton have seen each other. Margaret sees that Thornton looks careworn but noble. He greets Margaret like an old friend, but she is quiet throughout the evening.

Margaret is still sensitive on the subject of Thornton, even though she had earlier given up hope of clarifying matters between them.

Later that evening, Lennox hears Mr. Colthurst asking questions that might embarrass Thornton and tries to intercept the conversation. But Thornton doesn't shrink from acknowledging that he's been unsuccessful. He explains that he is seeking an employer who would let him explore some experimental practices, involving relationship with workers "beyond the more cash-nexus."

Thornton isn't ashamed of his failure and doesn't scramble to proudly defend his own reputation. Rather, he's now eager to experiment in ways he probably would have scorned early in the story.

Thornton explains his newfound conviction that "no mere institutions, however wise…can attach class to class as they should be attached, unless the working out of such institutions bring the individuals of the different classes into actual personal contact." He feels, for example, that workers should have a stake in the development and execution of masters' plans, rather than receiving them blindly, as if they were a piece of machinery. He believes that such acquaintance and common interest should help masters and men to understand and even like each other better.

Thornton's absorption of Margaret's ideas about class relationships has transformed both his theories and his practice; he no longer sees the two groups locked in perpetual conflict, but truly working together to advance the same interests.

When questioned, Thornton explains that he doesn't expect such practices to prevent strikes, but merely to "render strikes not the bitter, venomous sources of hatred they have hitherto been." Thornton suddenly approaches Margaret and tells her that he's received a round-robin letter stating the wish of some of his men—likely including Higgins—to continue working for him, when he is in a position to employ them again. Margaret speaks approvingly of this development, but is silent once again. Before Henry leaves, Margaret stops him and asks if they might meet tomorrow. Henry delights in the thought that Margaret seems to be depending on him more and more.

Thornton isn't naïve about the potential for conflict, but hopes that personal relationship will provide a basis for navigating conflict better. He also genuinely wants Margaret to be pleased about the ways he's changed.

CHAPTER 52

Henry and Margaret are enclosed in a private meeting for much of the next day. When he finds her hovering outside, Henry tells Edith to stop hoping that he and Margaret will marry. He is bringing Thornton with him the next day for another meeting.

Henry's hopes, newly rekindled, have been crushed, as Margaret's interested in his advisement and friendship, but decidedly has her own plans for the future.

The next day Thornton comes, though without Lennox. Margaret hurries in late, flustered. She tells Thornton she is sorry to be losing him as a tenant. She fumbles over some papers and, trembling, explains that Henry helped her to draw up a proposal, showing that Thornton might take some money of hers and resume his place at Marlborough Mills. She keeps searching for the correct paper, "anxious to have it all looked upon in the light of a mere business arrangement," but is stopped by Thornton's tone as he says her name with great tenderness.

Margaret takes the conventionally unfeminine step of initiating a business meeting with Thornton, and she's emphatic that her proposals not be looked upon as personal—but it's clear that she still has feelings for him. Speaking to Margaret by name is a deeply personal act in this historical context—and, in light of Thornton's previous offer, it's as good as another proposal.

Margaret hides her face as Thornton repeats her name. Finally, the third time, she hides her face on his shoulder, and he embraces her. Finally, she says, "Oh, Mr. Thornton, I am not good enough!" He tells her not to mock his own "deep feeling of unworthiness." He reminds her of the way she embraced him on the day of the riot.

Now that the two have mutual feelings for one another, Margaret's pride has given way to shyness, and each deeply respects the other. While Margaret's embrace of Thornton at Marlborough Mills was not a personal act, their current embrace, based on Margaret's financial rescuing of Thornton and her genuine confidence in who he is, is unmistakably personal.

Thornton says he has something to show her, and withdraws some dried roses from his pocket-book. After a moment, Margaret recognizes them as Helstone roses and asks when he was there. "I wanted to see the place where Margaret grew to what she is," he tells her, "even at the worst time of all, when I had no hope of ever calling her mine." It's implied that they kiss. The two wonder with quiet amusement how Aunt Shaw, and Mrs. Thornton, will react to their union.

Thornton's deep love for Margaret is shown by the fact that he still cared to know about her roots even when there was no hope of their union. The Helstone roses suggest that Helstone remains an enduing part of Margaret's identity—and that, through her union with Thornton, North and South are coming together at last.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

White, Sarah. "*North and South*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 11 Mar 2019. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

White, Sarah. "*North and South*." LitCharts LLC, March 11, 2019. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/north-and-south.

To cite any of the quotes from *North and South* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Gaskell, Elizabeth. North and South. Penguin. 1996.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Gaskell, Elizabeth. North and South. New York: Penguin. 1996.