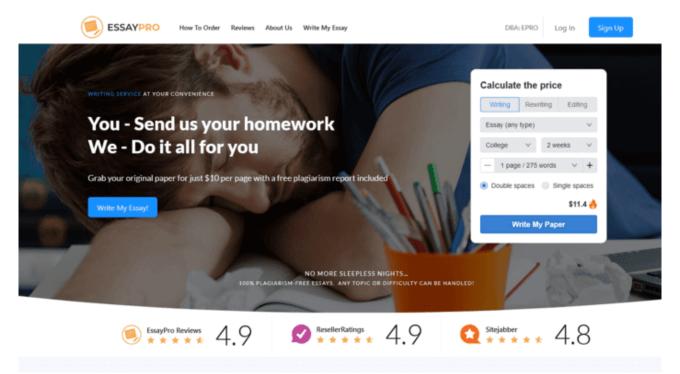
Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life



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Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell was born in London on Setpember 29th, 1810 to William and Elizabeth Stevenson. Her father William was a former Unitarian minister who, after retiring from the ministry, "combined farming, writing, and teaching before being appointed Keeper of the Records to the Treasury" (Allott 10). Her mother, Elizabeth died just over a year after giving birth and, consequently, while still an infant, Gaskell was sent off to live with her aunt, Hannah Lumb who resided in Heathside, Knutford. Throughout her young life, up until her 1832 marriage, Gaskell lived in various places around England including Stratfordon-Avon, where she received some education, Newcastle, Edinburgh, and Manchester. It was in Manchester that she met her husband, William Gaskell, a minister's assistant, "who was eventually to [become] Senior Minister and remain at Cross Street [Unitarian Chapel in Manchester] for the rest of a long, active life (Allott 11)." From 1832 to 1848, after her marriage to William Gaskell, Mrs. Gaskell lived a life of domesticity, giving birth to 6 children, with 4 surviving. Besides raising the 4 surviving children, Gaskell worked with her husband to aid, comfort, and minister to the poor of Manchester. In 1845, Gaskell suffered the haunting loss of her only son to scarlet fever at just nineteen months old. With the encouragement of her husband, Gaskell turned her grief towards writing, and her

literary career began.

Over the course of her literary career, Gaskell wrote "six novels, several nouvelles, a biography, about thirty short stories, a number of sketches and articles, and a few poems (Allott 8)." The novels, in chronological order were Mary Barton (1848), Cranford (1853), Ruth (1853), North and South (1855), Slyvia's Lovers (1863), and Cousin Phillis (1864). The biography was of her good friend and fellow authoress, Charlotte Brontë, The Life of Charlotte Brontë (1857). Gaskell's career included two controversies, one over her portrayal of the fallen woman in society in Ruth the other over accusations of libel from portrayals in The Life of Charlotte Brontë. Despite these controversies, Gaskell remained a popular literary figure throughout her life, even enjoying a friendship and working relationship with perhaps the most popular writer of the day, Charles Dickens, to whose Household Words publication she became a frequent contributor. When Gaskell passed away in 1865, The Athenaeum "rated [Gaskell] 'if not the most popular, with small question, the most powerful and finished female novelist of an epoch singularly rich in female novelists' (Victorian Web).

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