



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

UNKNOWN
TO HISTORY

Charlotte Yonge

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

Unknown to History

A Story of the Captivity of Mary of Scotland

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE



“They that parted from her meant to know her again.”



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Poor scape-goat of crimes, where,—her part what it may,
So tortured, so hunted to die,
Foul age of deceit and of hate,—on her head
Least stains of gore-guiltiness lie;
To the hearts of the just her blood from the dust
Not in vain for mercy will cry.

Poor scape-goat of nations and faiths in their strife
So cruel,—and thou so fair!
Poor girl!—so, best, in her misery named,—
Discrown'd of two kingdoms, and bare;
Not first nor last on this one was cast
The burden that others should share.

Visions of England, by F. T. PALGRAVE

CHAPTER I.
THE LITTLE WAIF.

ON a spring day, in the year 1568, Mistress Talbot sat in her lodging at Hull, an upper chamber, with a large latticed window, glazed with the circle and diamond leading perpetuated in Dutch pictures, and opening on a carved balcony, whence, had she been so minded, she could have shaken hands with her opposite neighbour. There was a richly carved mantel-piece, with a sea-coal fire burning in it, for though it was May, the sea winds blew cold, and there was a fishy odour about the town, such as it was well to counteract. The floor was of slippery polished oak, the walls hung with leather, gilded in some places and depending from cornices, whose ornaments proved to an initiated eye, that this had once been the refectory of a small priory, or cell, broken up at the Reformation.

Of furniture there was not much, only an open cupboard, displaying two silver cups and tankards, a sauce-pan of the same metal, a few tall, slender, Venetian glasses, a little pewter, and some rare shells. A few high-backed chairs were ranged against the wall; there was a tall "armory," *i.e.* a linen-press of dark oak, guarded on each side by the twisted weapons of the sea unicorn, and in the middle of the room stood a large, solid-looking table, adorned with a brown earthenware beau-pot, containing a stiff posy of roses, southernwood, gillyflowers, pinks and pansies, of small dimensions. On hooks, against the wall, hung a pair of spurs, a shield, a breastplate, and other pieces of armour, with an open helmet bearing the dog, the well-known crest of the Talbots of the Shrewsbury line.

On the polished floor, near the window, were a child's cart, a little boat, some whelks and limpets. Their owner, a stout boy of three years old, in a tight, borderless, round cap, and home-spun, madder-dyed frock, lay fast asleep in a big wooden cradle, scarcely large enough, however, to contain him, as he lay curled up, sucking his thumb, and hugging to his breast the soft fragment of a sea-bird's downy breast. If he stirred, his mother's foot was on the rocker, as she sat spinning, but her spindle danced languidly on the floor, as if "feeble was her



“His mother’s foot was on the rocker.”

hand, and silly her thread;" while she listened anxiously, for every sound in the street below. She wore a dark blue dress, with a small lace ruff opening in front, deep cuffs to match, and a white apron likewise edged with lace, and a coif, bent down in the centre, over a sweet countenance, matronly, though youthful, and now full of wistful expectancy; not untinged with anxiety and sorrow.

Susan Hardwicke was a distant kinswoman of the famous Bess of Hardwicke, and had formed one of the little court of gentlewomen with whom great ladies were wont to surround themselves. There she met Richard Talbot, the second son of a relative of the Earl of Shrewsbury, a young man who, with the indifference of those days to service by land or sea, had been at one time a gentleman pensioner of Queen Mary; at another had sailed under some of the great mariners of the western main. There he had acquired substance enough to make the offer of his hand to the dowerless Susan no great imprudence; and as neither could be a subject for ambitious plans, no obstacle was raised to their wedding.

He took his wife home to his old father's house in the precincts of Sheffield Park, where she was kindly welcomed; but wealth did not so abound in the family but that, when opportunity offered, he was thankful to accept the command of the *Mastiff*, a vessel commissioned by Queen Elizabeth, but built, manned, and maintained at the expense of the Earl of Shrewsbury. It formed part of a small squadron which was cruising on the eastern coast to watch over the intercourse between France and Scotland, whether in the interest of the imprisoned Mary, or of the Lords of the Congregation. He had obtained lodgings for Mistress Susan at Hull, so that he might be with her when he put into harbour, and she was expecting him for the first time since the loss of their second child, a daughter whom he had scarcely seen during her little life of a few months.

Moreover, there had been a sharp storm a few days previously, and experience had not hardened her to the anxieties of a sailor's wife. She had been down once already to the quay, and learnt all that the old sailors could tell her of chances and conjectures; and when her boy began to fret from hunger and weariness, she had left her serving-man, Gervas, to watch for further tidings. Yet, so does one trouble drive out another, that whereas she had a few days ago dreaded the sorrow of his return, she would now have given worlds to hear his step.

Hark, what is that in the street? Oh, folly! If the *Mastiff* were in, would not Gervas have long ago brought her the tidings? Should she look over the balcony only to be disappointed again? Ah! she had

been prudent, for the sounds were dying away. Nay, there was a foot at the door! Gervas with ill news! No, no, it bounded as never did Gervas's step! It was coming up. She started from the chair, quivering with eagerness, as the door opened and in hurried her suntanned sailor! She was in his arms in a trance of joy. That was all she knew for a moment, and then, it was as if something else were given back to her. No, it was not a dream! It was substance. In her arms was a little swaddled baby, in her ears its feeble wail, mingled with the glad shout of little Humfrey, as he scrambled from the cradle to be uplifted in his father's arms.

"What is this?" she asked, gazing at the infant between terror and tenderness, as its weak cry and exhausted state forcibly recalled the last hours of her own child.

"It is the only thing we could save from a wreck off the Spurn," said her husband. "Scottish as I take it. The rogues seem to have taken to their boats, leaving behind them a poor woman and her child. I trust they met their deserts and were swamped. We saw the fluttering of her coats as we made for the Humber, and I sent Goatley and Jaques in the boat to see if anything lived. The poor wench was gone before they could lift her up, but the little one cried lustily, though it has waxen weaker since. We had no milk on board, and could only give it bits of soft bread soaked in beer, and I misdoubt me whether it did not all run out at the corners of its mouth."

This was interspersed with little Humfrey's eager outcries that little sister was come again, and Mrs. Talbot, the tears running down her cheeks, hastened to summon her one woman-servant, Colet, to bring the porringer of milk.

Captain Talbot had only hurried ashore to bring the infant, and show himself to his wife. He was forced instantly to return to the wharf, but he promised to come back as soon as he should have taken order for his men, and for the *Mastiff*, which had suffered considerably in the storm, and would need to be refitted.

Colet hastily put a manchet of fresh bread, a pasty, and a stoup of wine into a basket, and sent it by her husband, Gervas, after their master; and then eagerly assisted her mistress in coaxing the infant to swallow food, and in removing the soaked swaddling clothes which the captain and his crew had not dared to meddle with.

When Captain Talbot returned, as the rays of the setting sun glanced high on the roofs and chimneys, little Humfrey stood peeping through the tracery of the balcony, watching for him, and shrieking with joy at the first glimpse of the sea-bird's feather in his cap. The

spotless home-spun cloth and the trenchers were laid for supper, a festive capon was prepared by the choicest skill of Mistress Susan, and the little shipwrecked stranger lay fast asleep in the cradle.

All was well with it now, Mrs. Talbot said. Nothing had ailed it but cold and hunger, and when it had been fed, warmed, and dressed, it had fallen sweetly asleep in her arms, appeasing her heartache for her own little Sue, while Humfrey fully believed that father had brought his little sister back again.

The child was in truth a girl, apparently three or four months old. She had been rolled up in Mrs. Talbot's baby's clothes, and her own long swaddling bands hung over the back of a chair, where they had been dried before the fire. They were of the finest woollen below, and cambric above, and the outermost were edged with lace, whose quality Mrs. Talbot estimated very highly.

"See," she added, "what we found within. A Popish relic, is it not? Colet and Mistress Gale were for making away with it at once, but it seemed to me that it was a token whereby the poor babe's friends may know her again, if she have any kindred not lost at sea."

The token was a small gold cross, of peculiar workmanship, with a crystal in the middle, through which might be seen some mysterious object neither husband nor wife could make out, but which they agreed must be carefully preserved for the identification of their little waif. Mrs. Talbot also produced a strip of writing which she had found sewn to the inmost band wrapped round the little body, but it had no superscription, and she believed it to be either French, Latin, or High Dutch, for she could make nothing of it. Indeed, the good lady's education had only included reading, writing, needlework and cookery, and she knew no language but her own. Her husband had been taught Latin, but his acquaintance with modern tongues was of the nautical order, and entirely oral and vernacular. However, it enabled him to aver that the letter—if such it were—was neither Scottish, French, Spanish, nor High or Low Dutch. He looked at it in all directions, and shook his head over it.

"Who can read it, for us?" asked Mrs. Talbot. "Shall we ask Master Heatherthwayte? he is a scholar, and he said he would look in to see how you fared."

"At supper-time, I trow," said Richard, rather grimly, "the smell of thy stew will bring him down in good time."

"Nay, dear sir, I thought you would be fain to see the good man, and he lives but poorly in his garret."

"Scarce while he hath good wives like thee to boil his pot for him,"

said Richard, smiling. "Tell me, hath he heard aught of this gear? thou hast not laid this scroll before him?"

"No, Colet brought it to me only now, having found it when washing the swaddling-bands, stitched into one of them."

"Then hark thee, good wife, not one word to him of the writing."

"Might he not interpret it?"

"Not he! I must know more about it ere I let it pass forth from mine hands, or any strange eye fall upon it— Ha, in good time! I hear his step on the stair."

The captain hastily rolled up the scroll and put it into his pouch, while Mistress Susan felt as if she had made a mistake in her hospitality, yet almost as if her husband were unjust towards the good man who had been such a comfort to her in her sorrow; but there was no lack of cordiality or courtesy in Richard's manner when, after a short, quick knock, there entered a figure in hat, cassock, gown, and bands, with a pleasant, though grave countenance, the complexion showing that it had been tanned and sunburnt in early youth, although it wore later traces of a sedentary student life, and, it might be, of less genial living than had nourished the up-growth of that sturdily-built frame.

Master Joseph Heatherthwayte was the greatly underpaid curate of a small parish on the outskirts of Hull. He contrived to live on some (pounds)10 per annum in the attic of the house where the Talbots lodged,—and not only to live, but to be full of charitable deeds, mostly at the expense of his own appetite. The square cut of his bands, and the uncompromising roundness of the hat which he doffed on his entrance, marked him as inclined to the Puritan party, which, being that of apparent progress, attracted most of the ardent spirits of the time.

Captain Talbot's inclinations did not lie that way, but he respected and liked his fellow-lodger, and his vexation had been merely the momentary disinclination of a man to be interrupted, especially on his first evening at home. He responded heartily to Master Heatherthwayte's warm pressure of the hand and piously expressed congratulation on his safety, mixed with condolence on the grief that had befallen him.

"And you have been a good friend to my poor wife in her sorrow," said Richard, "for the which I thank you heartily, sir."

"Truly, sir, I could have been her scholar, with such edifying resignation did she submit to the dispensation," returned the clergyman, uttering these long words in a broad northern accent which had nothing incongruous in it to Richard's ears, and taking advantage of the lady's absence on "hospitable tasks intent" to speak in her praise.

Little Humfrey, on his father's knee, comprehending that they

were speaking of the recent sorrow, put in his piece of information that "father had brought little sister back from the sea."

"Ah, child!" said Master Heatherthwayte, in the ponderous tone of one unused to children, "thou hast yet to learn the words of the holy David, 'I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.'"

"Bring not that thought forward, Master Heatherthwayte," said Richard, "I am well pleased that my poor wife and this little lad can take the poor little one as a solace sent them by God, as she assuredly is."

"Mean you, then, to adopt her into your family?" asked the minister.

"We know not if she hath any kin," said Richard, and at that moment Susan entered, followed by the man and maid, each bearing a portion of the meal, which was consumed by the captain and the clergyman as thoroughly hungry men eat; and there was silence till the capon's bones were bare and two large tankards had been filled with Xeres sack, captured in a Spanish ship, "the only good thing that ever came from Spain," quoth the sailor.

Then he began to tell how he had weathered the storm on the Berwickshire coast; but he was interrupted by another knock, followed by the entrance of a small, pale, spare man, with the lightest possible hair, very short, and almost invisible eyebrows; he had a round ruff round his neck, and a black, scholarly gown, belted round his waist with a girdle, in which he carried writing tools.

"Ha, Cuthbert Langston, art thou there?" said the captain, rising. "Thou art kindly welcome. Sit down and crush a cup of sack with Master Heatherthwayte and me."

"Thanks, cousin," returned the visitor, "I heard that the *Mastiff* was come in, and I came to see whether all was well."

"It was kindly done, lad," said Richard, while the others did their part of the welcome, though scarcely so willingly. Cuthbert Langston was a distant relation on the mother's side of Richard, a young scholar, who, after his education at Oxford, had gone abroad with a nobleman's son as his pupil, and on his return, instead of taking Holy Orders, as was expected, had obtained employment in a merchant's counting-house at Hull, for which his knowledge of languages eminently fitted him. Though he possessed none of the noble blood of the Talbots, the employment was thought by Mistress Susan somewhat derogatory to the family dignity, and there was a strong suspicion both in her mind and that of Master Heatherthwayte that his change of purpose was due to the change of religion in England, although he was a perfectly regular church-goer. Captain Talbot, however, laughed at all this, and, though he had not much in common with his kinsman, always treated

him in a cousinly fashion. He too had heard a rumour of the foundling, and made inquiry for it, upon which Richard told his story in greater detail, and his wife asked what the poor mother was like.

"I saw her not," he answered, "but Goatley thought the poor woman to whom she was bound more like to be nurse than mother, judging by her years and her garments."

"The mother may have been washed off before," said Susan, lifting the little one from the cradle, and hushing it. "Weep not, poor babe, thou hast found a mother here."

"Saw you no sign of the crew?" asked Master Heatherthwayte.

"None at all. The vessel I knew of old as the brig *Bride of Dunbar*, one of the craft that ply between Dunbar and the French ports."

"And how think you? Were none like to be saved?"

"I mean to ride along the coast to-morrow, to see whether aught can be heard of them, but even if their boats could live in such a sea, they would have evil hap among the wreckers if they came ashore. I would not desire to be a shipwrecked man in these parts, and if I had a Scottish or a French tongue in my head so much the worse for me."

"Ah, Master Heatherthwayte," said Susan, "should not a man give up the sea when he is a husband and father?"

"Tush, dame! With God's blessing the good ship *Mastiff* will ride out many another such gale. Tell thy mother, little Numpy, that an English sailor is worth a dozen French or Scottish lubbers."

"Sir," said Master Heatherthwayte, "the pious trust of the former part of your discourse is contradicted by the boast of the latter end."

"Nay, Sir Minister, what doth a sailor put his trust in but his God foremost, and then his good ship and his brave men?"

It should be observed that all the three men wore their hats, and each made a reverent gesture of touching them. The clergyman seemed satisfied by the answer, and presently added that it would be well, if Master and Mistress Talbot meant to adopt the child, that she should be baptized.

"How now?" said Richard, "we are not so near any coast of Turks or Infidels that we should deem her sprung of heathen folk."

"Assuredly not," said Cuthbert Langston, whose quick, light-coloured eyes had spied the reliquary in Mistress Susan's work-basket, "if this belongs to her. By your leave, kinswoman," and he lifted it in his hand with evident veneration, and began examining it.

"It is Babylonish gold, an accursed thing!" exclaimed Master Heatherthwayte. "Beware, Master Talbot, and cast it from thee."

"Nay," said Richard, "that shall I not do. It may lead to the discovery

of the child's kindred. Why, my master, what harm think you it will do to us in my dame's casket? Or what right have we to make away with the little one's property?"

His common sense was equally far removed from the horror of the one visitor as from the reverence of the other, and so it pleased neither. Master Langston was the first to speak, observing that the relic made it evident that the child must have been baptized.

"A Popish baptism," said Master Heatherthwayte, "with chrisms and taper and words and gestures to destroy the pure simplicity of the sacrament."

Controversy here seemed to be setting in, and the infant cause of it here setting up a cry, Susan escaped under pretext of putting Humfrey to bed in the next room, and carried off both the little ones. The conversation then fell upon the voyage, and the captain described the impregnable aspect of the castle of Dumbarton, which was held for Queen Mary by her faithful partisan, Lord Flemyng. On this, Cuthbert Langston asked whether he had heard any tidings of the imprisoned Queen, and he answered that it was reported at Leith that she had well-nigh escaped from Lochleven, in the disguise of a lavender or washerwoman. She was actually in the boat, and about to cross the lake, when a rude oarsman attempted to pull aside her muffler, and the whiteness of the hand she raised in self-protection betrayed her, so that she was carried back. "If she had reached Dumbarton," he said, "she might have mocked at the Lords of the Congregation. Nay, she might have been in that very brig, whose wreck I beheld."

"And well would it have been for Scotland and England had it been the will of Heaven that so it should fall out," observed the Puritan.

"Or it may be," said the merchant, "that the poor lady's escape was frustrated by Providence, that she might be saved from the rocks of the Spurn."

"The poor lady, truly! Say rather the murtheress," quoth Heatherthwayte.

"Say rather the victim and scapegoat of other men's plots," protested Langston.

"Come, come, sirs," says Talbot, "we'll have no high words here on what Heaven only knoweth. Poor lady she is, in all sooth, if sackless; poorer still if guilty; so I know not what matter there is for falling out about. In any sort, I will not have it at my table." He spoke with the authority of the captain of a ship, and the two visitors, scarce knowing it, submitted to his decision of manner, but the harmony of the evening seemed ended. Cuthbert Langston soon rose to bid good-night, first

asking his cousin at what hour he proposed to set forth for the Spurn, to which Richard briefly replied that it depended on what had to be done as to the repairs of the ship.

The clergyman tarried behind him to say, "Master Talbot, I marvel that so godly a man as you have ever been should be willing to harbour one so popishly affected, and whom many suspect of being a seminary priest."

"Master Heatherthwayte," returned the captain, "my kinsman is my kinsman, and my house is my house. No offence, sir, but I brook not meddling."

The clergyman protested that no offence was intended, only caution, and betook himself to his own bare chamber, high above. No sooner was he gone than Captain Talbot again became absorbed in the endeavour to spell out the mystery of the scroll, with his elbows on the table and his hands over his ears, nor did he look up till he was touched by his wife, when he uttered an impatient demand what she wanted now.

She had the little waif in her arms undressed, and with only a woollen coverlet loosely wrapped round her, and without speaking she pointed to the little shoulder-blades, where two marks had been indelibly made—on one side the crowned monogram of the Blessed Virgin¹, on the other a device like the Labarum,² only that the upright was surmounted by a fleur-de-lis. Richard Talbot gave a sort of perplexed grunt of annoyance to acknowledge that he saw them.

"Poor little maid! how could they be so cruel? They have been branded with a hot iron," said the lady.

"They that parted from her meant to know her again," returned Talbot.

"Surely they are Popish marks," added Mistress Susan.

"Look you here, Dame Sue, I know you for a discreet woman. Keep this gear to yourself, both the letter and the marks. Who hath seen them?"

"I doubt me whether even Colet has seen this mark."

"That is well. Keep all out of sight. Many a man has been brought into trouble for a less matter swelled by prating tongues."

1



2



"Have you made it out?"

"Not I. It may be only the child's horoscope, or some old wife's charm that is here sewn up, and these marks may be naught but some sailor's freak; but, on the other hand, they may be concerned with perilous matter, so the less said the better."

"Should they not be shown to my lord, or to her Grace's Council?"

"I'm not going to run my head into trouble for making a coil about what may be naught. That's what befell honest Mark Walton. He thought he had seized matter of State, and went up to Master Walsingham, swelling like an Indian turkey-cock, with his secret letters, and behold they turned out to be a Dutch fishwife's charm to bring the herrings. I can tell you he has rued the work he made about it ever since. On the other hand, let it get abroad through yonder prating fellow, Heatherthwayte, or any other, that Master Richard Talbot had in his house a child with, I know not what Popish tokens, and a scroll in an unknown tongue, and I should be had up in gyves for suspicion of treason, or may be harbouring the Prince of Scotland himself, when it is only some poor Scottish archer's babe."

"You would not have me part with the poor little one?"

"Am I a Turk or a Pagan? No. Only hold thy peace, as I shall hold mine, until such time as I can meet some one whom I can trust to read this riddle. Tell me—what like is the child? Wouldst guess it to be of gentle, or of clownish blood, if women can tell such things?"

"Of gentle blood, assuredly," cried the lady, so that he smiled and said, "I might have known that so thou wouldst answer."

"Nay, but see her little hands and fingers, and the mould of her dainty limbs. No Scottish fisher clown was her father, I dare be sworn. Her skin is as fair and fine as my Humfrey's, and moreover she has always been in hands that knew how a babe should be tended. Any woman can tell you that!"

"And what like is she in your woman's eyes? What complexion doth she promise?"

"Her hair, what she has of it, is dark; her eyes—bless them—are of a deep blue, or purple, such as most babes have till they take their true tint. There is no guessing. Humfrey's eyes were once like to be brown, now are they as blue as thine own."

"I understand all that," said Captain Talbot, smiling. "If she have kindred, they will know her better by the sign manual on her tender flesh than by her face."

"And who are they?"

"Who are they?" echoed the captain, rolling up the scroll in de-

spair. "Here, take it, Susan, and keep it safe from all eyes. Whatever it may be, it may serve thereafter to prove her true name. And above all, not a word or breath to Heatherthwayte, or any of thy gossips, wear they coif or bands."

"Ah, sir! that you will mistrust the good man."

"I said not I mistrust any one; only that I will have no word of all this go forth! Not one! Thou heedest me, wife?"

"Verily I do, sir; I will be mute."