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AND HER BIBLE



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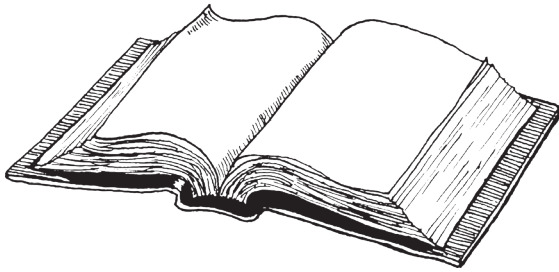
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Mary Jones and Her Bible

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AND HER BIBLE



Mary Ropes



Generations
PASSING ON THE FAITH

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Printed in Korea.

ISBN: 978-1-954745-07-0

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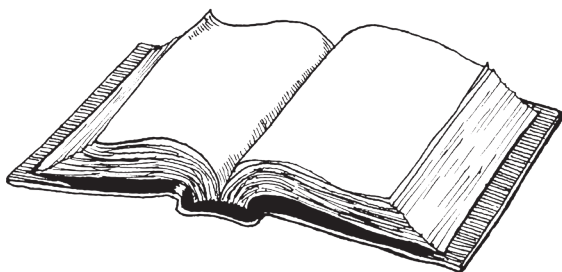
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CHAPTER 1

AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN



*O Shepherd of all the flock of God,
Watch over Thy lambs and feed them;
For Thou alone, through the rugged paths,
In the way of life canst lead them.*

It would be hard to find a lovelier, more picturesque spot than the valley on the south-west side of Cader Idris, where nestles the little village of Llanfihangel-y-Pennant. Above it towers the majestic mountain with its dark crags, its rocky precipices, and its steep ascents; while stretching away in the distance to the west-ward, lie the bold shore and glistening waters of Cardigan Bay, where the white breakers come rolling in and dash into foam, only to gather afresh, and return undaunted to the charge.

The mountain, and the outline of the bay, and the wonderful picturesqueness of the valley, are still much as they were a hundred years ago. Still the eye of the traveller gazes in wonder at their wild beauty, as other eyes of other travellers did in times gone by. But while Nature's great landmarks remain, or undergo a change so gradual as to be almost imperceptible, man, the tenant of God's earth, is born, lives his brief life, and passes away, leaving only too often hardly even a memory behind him.

And now as, in thought, we stand upon the lower slopes of Cader Idris, and look across the little village of Llanfihangel, we find ourselves wondering what kind of people have occupied those rude grey cottages for the last century; what were their simple histories, what their habits, their toils and struggles, sorrows and pleasures.

To those then who share our interest in the place and neighbourhood, and in events connected with them, we would tell the simple tale which gives Llanfihangel a place among the justly celebrated and honoured spots of our beloved country; since from its soil sprang a shoot which, growing apace, soon spread forth great branches throughout the earth, becoming indeed a tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

In the year 1792, nearly a hundred years ago, the night shadows had fallen around the little village of Llanfihangel. The season was late autumn, and a cold wind was moaning and sighing among the trees stripping them of their changed garments, lately so green and gay, whirling them round in eddies and laying them in shivering heaps along the narrow valley.

Wan and watery, the moon, encompassed by peaked masses of cloud that looked like another ghostly Cader Idris

in the sky, had risen, and now cast a faint light across a line of jutting crags, bringing into relief their sharp ragged edges against the dark background of rolling vapour.

In pleasant contrast to the night with its threatening gloom, a warm light shone through the windows of one of the cottages that formed the village. The light was caused by the blaze of a fire of dried drift-wood on the stone hearth, while in a rude wooden stand a rushlight burned, throwing its somewhat uncertain brightness upon a loom where sat a weaver at work. A bench, two or three stools, a rude cupboard, and a kitchen-table—these, with the loom, were all the furniture.

Standing in the centre of the room was a middle-aged woman, dressed in a cloak and the tall conical Welsh hat worn by many of the peasants to this day.

“I am sorry you cannot go, Jacob,” said she. “You’ll be missed at the meeting. But the same Lord Almighty who gives us the meetings for the good of our souls, sent you that wheezing of the chest, for the trying of your body and spirit, and we must needs have patience till He sees fit to take it away again.”

“Yes, wife, and I’m thankful that I needn’t sit idle, but can still ply my trade,” replied Jacob Jones. “There’s many a deal worse off. But what are you waiting for, Molly? You’ll be late for the exercises; it must be gone six o’clock.”

“I’m waiting for that child, and she’s gone for the lantern,” responded Mary Jones, whom her husband generally called Molly, to distinguish her from their daughter who was also Mary.

Jacob smiled. “The lantern! Yes,” said he; “you’ll need it this dark night. ‘Twas a good thought of yours, wife, to let Mary take it regular as you do, for the child wouldn’t be

allowed to attend those meetings otherwise. And she does seem so eager after everything of the kind."

"Yes, she knows already pretty nearly all that you and I can teach her of the Bible, as we learnt it, don't she, Jacob? She's only eight now, but I remember when she was but a wee child she would sit on your knee for hours on a Sunday, and hear tell of Abraham and Joseph, and David and Daniel. There never was a girl like our Mary for Bible stories, or any stories, for the matter of that, bless her! But here she is! You've been a long time getting that lantern, child, and we must hurry or we shall be late."

Little Mary raised a pair of bright dark eyes to her mother's face.

"Yes, mother," she replied, "I was long because I ran to borrow neighbour Williams's lantern. The latch of ours won't hold, and there's such a wind tonight, that I knew we should have the light blown out."

"There's a moon," said Mrs. Jones, "and I could have done without a lantern."

"Yes, but then you know, mother, I should have had to stay at home," responded Mary, "and I do so love to go."

"You needn't tell me that, child," laughed Molly. "Then come along, Mary; good-bye, Jacob."

"Good-bye, father dear! I wish you could come too!" cried Mary, running back to give Jacob a last kiss.

"Go your way, child, and mind you remember all you can to tell old father when you come home."

Then the cottage door opened, and Mary and her mother sallied out into the cold windy night.

The moon had disappeared now behind a thick dark cloud, and little Mary's borrowed lantern was very acceptable. Carefully she held it, so that the light fell upon the way

they had to traverse, a way which would have been difficult if not dangerous, without its friendly aid.

“Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path,” said Mrs. Jones, as she took her little daughter’s hand in hers.

“Yes, mother, I was just thinking of that,” replied the child. “I wish I knew ever so many verses like this one.”

“How glad I should be if your father and I could teach you more; but it’s years since we learned, and we’ve got no Bible, and our memories are not as good as they used to be,” sighed the mother.

A walk of some length, and over a rough road, brought them at last to the little meeting-house where the church members belonging to the Methodist body were in the habit of attending.

They were rather late, and the exercises had begun, but kind farmer Evans made room for them on his bench, and found for Mrs. Jones the place in the psalm-book from which the little company had been singing. Mary was the only child there, but her face was so grave, and her manner so solemn and reverent, that no one looking at her could have felt that she was out of place; and the church members who met there from time to time, had come to look upon this little girl as one of their number, and welcomed her accordingly.

When the meeting was over, and Mary, having relighted her lantern, was ready to accompany her mother home, farmer Evans put his great broad hand upon the child’s shoulder, saying:

“Well, my little maid! You’re rather young for these meetings, but the Lord has need of lambs as well as sheep, and He is well pleased when the lambs learn to hear His voice early, even in their tender years.”

Then with a gentle fatherly caress the good old man released the child, and turned away, carrying with him the remembrance of that earnest intelligent face, happy in its intentness, joyful in its solemnity, having in its expression a promise of future excellence and power for good.

“Why haven’t we a Bible of our own, mother?” asked Mary as she trotted homeward, lantern in hand.

“Because Bibles are scarce, child, and we’re too poor to pay the price of one. A weaver’s is an honest trade, Mary, but we don’t get rich by it, and we think ourselves happy if we can keep the wolf from the door, and have clothes to cover us. Still, precious as the Word of God would be in our hands, more precious are its teachings and its truths in our hearts. I tell you, my little girl, they who have learned the love of God, have learned the greatest truth that even the Bible can teach them; and those who are trusting the Saviour for their pardon and peace, and for eternal life at last, can wait patiently for a fuller knowledge of His word and will.”

“I suppose you can wait, mother, because you’ve waited so long that you’re used to it,” replied the child; “but it’s harder for me. Every time I hear something read out of the Bible, I long to hear more, and when I can read it will be harder still.”

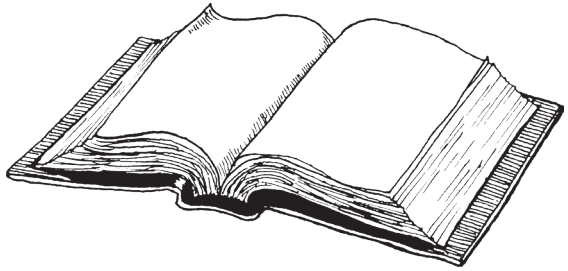
Mrs. Jones was about to answer, when she stumbled over a stone, and fell, though fortunately without hurting herself. Mary’s thoughts were so full of what she had been saying, that she had become careless in the management of the lantern, and her mother not seeing the stone, had struck her foot against it.

“Ah, child! it’s the present duties after all that we must look after most,” said Molly, as she got slowly up; “and even a fall may teach us a lesson, Mary. The very Word of God itself, which is a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path, can’t save

us from many a tumble if we don't use it aright, and let the light shine on our daily life, helping us in its smallest duties and cares. Remember this, my little Mary."

And little Mary did remember this, and her after life proved that she had taken the lesson to heart—a simple lesson, taught by a simple, unlearned handmaid of the Lord, but a lesson which the child treasured up in her very heart of hearts.

THE ONE GREAT NEED



*For this I know, whate'er of earthly good
Fall to the portion of immortal man,
Still unfulfill'd in him is God's great plan,
And Heaven's richest gift misunderstood,
Until the Word of Life—exhaustless store
Of light and truth—be his for evermore.*

In the homes of the poor, where the time of the elder members of the family is precious, they being the bread-winners of the household, the little ones learn to be useful very early. How often we have known girls of six to take the entire charge of a younger brother and sister, while many children of that age run errands, do simple shopping,

and make themselves of very real and substantial use.

Such was the case in the family of Jacob Jones. Jacob and Molly were engaged in weaving the woollen cloth, so much of which used to be made in Wales. Thus many of the household duties devolved upon Mary; and at an age when children of richer parents are amusing themselves with their dolls or picture-books, our little maid was sweeping, and dusting, and scrubbing, and digging and weeding.

It was Mary who fed the few hens, and looked for their eggs, so often laid in queer, wrong places, rather than in the nest.

It was Mary who took care of the hive, and who never feared the bees; and it was Mary again, who, when more active duties were done, would draw a low stool towards the hearth in winter or outside the cottage door in summer, and try to make or mend her own little simple garments, singing to herself the while in Welsh, a verse or two of the old-fashioned metrical version of the Psalms, or repeating texts which she had picked up and retained in her quick, eager little brain.

In the long, light summer evenings, it was her delight to sit where she could see the majestic form of Cader Idris with its varying lights and shadows, as the sun sank lower and lower in the horizon. And in her childish imagination, this mountain was made to play many a part, as she recalled the stories which her parents had told her, and the chapters she had heard read at chapel.

Now, Cader Idris was the mountain in the land of Moriah whither the patriarch was sent on his painful mission; and Mary would fix her great dark eyes upon the rocky steeps before her, until she fancied she could see the venerable Abraham and his son toiling up towards the appointed place of

sacrifice, the lad bearing the wood for the burnt-offering.

More and more vividly the whole scene would grow upon the child's fancy, until the picture seemed to be almost a reality, and she could imagine that she heard the patriarch's voice borne faintly to her ear by the breeze that fanned her cheek—a voice that replied pathetically to his son's question, in the words, "My son, the Lord will provide Himself a lamb for the burnt-offering."

Then the scene would change; night was drawing near, and Cader Idris assuming softer outlines, was the mountain where the Saviour went to pray.

Leaving the thronging multitude who had been dwelling upon His every word—leaving even His disciples whom He so loved, there was Jesus—alone save for the Eternal Father's presence—praying, and refreshing thus His weary spirit, after the work and trials and sorrows of the day.

"If I'd only lived in those days," sighed little Mary, sometimes, "how I should have loved Him! and He'd have taught me, perhaps, as He did those two who walked such a long way with Him, without knowing that it was Jesus; only I think *I* should have known Him, just through love."

Nor was it only the mountain with which Mary associated scenes from sacred history or Gospel narration. The long, narrow valley in the upper end of which Llanfihangel was situated, ran down to the sea at no great distance by a place called Towyn. And when the child happened to be near, she would steal a few moments to sit down on the shore, and gaze across the blue-green waters of Cardigan Bay, and dream of the Sea of Galilee, and of the Saviour who walked upon its waters—who stilled their raging with a word, and who even sometimes chose to make His pulpit of a boat, and preach thus to the congregation that stood upon the shore and clus-

tered to the very edge of the water, so that they might not lose a word of the precious things that He spoke. It will be seen, therefore, that upon Mary's mind a deep and lasting impression was made by all that she had heard; and child though she might be in years, there were not wanting in her evidences of an earnest, energetic nature, an intelligent brain, and a warm, loving heart.

It is by the first leaves put forth by the seedling that we discern the nature, and know the name of the plant; and so in childhood, the character and talents can often be detected in the early beauty of their first unfolding and development.

One afternoon, when Jacob and his wife were seated at their looms, and Mary was sewing a patch into an almost worn-out garment of her own, a little tap at the door was followed by the entrance of Mrs. Evans, the good farmer's wife, a kind, motherly, and in some respects superior woman, who was looked up to and beloved by many of the Llanfihangel villagers.

"Good day to you, neighbours!" she said, cheerily, her comely face all aglow. "Jacob, how is your chest feeling? Bad, I'm afraid, as I haven't seen you out of late. Molly, you're looking hearty as usual, and my little Mary, too—Toddles, as I used to call you when you were not much more than a baby, and running round on your sturdy pins as fast as many a bigger child. Don't I remember you then! A mere baby as I said, and yet you'd keep a deal stiller than any mouse if your father there would make up a story you could understand, more particular if it was out of the Bible. Daniel and the Lions, or David and the Giant, or Peter in the Prison—these were the favourites then. Yes, and the history of Joseph and his brethren; only you used to cry when the naughty brothers put Joseph in the pit, and went home and told Jacob that

wicked lie that almost broke the old man's heart."

"She's as fond of anything of that sort now as she was then," said Jacob Jones, pausing in his work; "or rather she's fonder than ever, ma'am. I only wish we were able to give her a bit of schooling. It seems hard, for the child is willing enough, and it's high time she was learning something. Why, Mrs. Evans, she can't read yet, and she's eight years old!"

Mary looked up, her face flushing, her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh! If I only could learn!" she cried, eagerly. "I'm such a big girl, and it's so dreadful not to know how to read. If I could, I would read all the lovely stories myself, and not trouble any one to tell them."

"You forget, Mary, we've no Bible," said Molly Jones, "and we can't afford to buy one either, so dear and scarce they are."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Evans, "it's a great want in our country; my husband was telling me only the other day that the scarcity of Welsh Bibles is getting to be spoken of everywhere. Even those who can afford to pay for them get them with difficulty, and only by bespeaking them; and poor people can't get them at all. But we hope the Society for Christian Knowledge in London may print some more soon; it won't be before they're wanted."

"But with all this talk, Mrs. Jones," continued the farmer's wife, "I am forgetting my errand in coming here, and that was to ask if you'd any new-laid eggs. I've a large order sent me, and our hens are laying badly, so that I can't make up the number. I've been collecting a few here and there, but I haven't enough yet."

"Mary knows more about the hens and eggs than I do," said Molly, looking at her little daughter, who had not put a stitch into her patch while the talk about Bibles had been

going on, and whose cheeks and eyes showed in their deepened colour and light how interested she had been in what had been said.

But now the child started half guiltily from her low seat, saying, "I'll get what we have to show you, Mrs. Evans."

Presently she came in with a little basket containing about a dozen eggs. The farmer's wife put them into her bag, then patting Mary's pink cheeks rose to take her leave, after paying for the eggs.

"And remember this, little maid," she said, kindly, when after saying good-bye to Jacob and Molly, she was taking leave of Mary at the door. "Remember this, my dear little girl; as soon as you know how to read (if by that time you still have no Bible) you shall come to the farm when you like, and read and study ours—that is, if you can manage to get so far."

"It's only two miles, that's nothing!" said sturdy Mary, with a glance down at her strong little bare feet. "I'd walk further than that for such a pleasure, ma'am." Then she added with a less joyful ring in her voice, "At least I would, if ever I *did* learn to read."

"Never mind, little woman! The likes of you wasn't made to sit in the dark always." replied Mrs. Evans in her cheery, comfortable tones. "The Lord made the want, and He'll satisfy it; be very sure of that. Remember, Mary, when the multitude that waited on the Saviour were hungry, the Lord did not send them away empty, though no one saw how they were to be fed; and He'll take care you get the bread of life too, for all it seems so unlikely now. Good-bye, and God bless you, my child!" and good Mrs. Evans, with a parting nod to the weaver and his wife, and another to Mary, went out, and got into her little pony-cart, which was waiting for her in the road, under the care of one of the farm-boys.

Mary stood at the door and watched their visitor till she was out of sight. Then, before she closed it, she clasped her small brown hands against her breast, and her thoughts formed themselves into a prayer something like this:

“Dear Lord, who gavest bread to the hungry folk in the old time, and didst teach and bless even the poorest, please let me learn, and not grow up in darkness.”

Then she shut the door and came and sat down, resolving in her childish heart that if God heard and answered her prayer, and she learned to read His Word, she would do what she could, all her life long, to help others as she herself had been helped.

How our little Mary kept her resolution will be seen in the remaining chapters of this simple narrative.