

**MOSSDALE:
A TALE**

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Mossdale: A Tale by Anna M. De Iongh

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**MOSSDALE:
A TALE**



MOSSDALE—FRONTIERPICK.



MOSSDALE.

CHAPTER I.

“Through many a dark and dreary vale
They passed, and many a region dolorous.”

MILTON.

PICTURE to yourself a narrow valley, with very high and rugged mountains on either side, and having huge masses of rock and large stones lying scattered about in all directions—many of them deeply imbedded in the ground, and completely overgrown with a profusion of thick, soft moss in a variety of the most beautiful shades, varying from the lightest and brightest green to a dusky brown, and the darkest olive colour. On one side of the valley runs a rapid stream of clear and sparkling water, murmuring, bubbling, and gurgling over its bed of smooth stones. Such is Mossdale, or, as it is there called, *Moosthal*, in Alsace—not far from Switzerland on the one hand, nor from Germany in another direction.

Owing to its narrowness, and the great height and ruggedness of the mountains on each side, the valley would always be rather dark and gloomy-looking, were it not that, stretching from north to south, on a gentle declivity, it has the full benefit of the sun's rays during a part of the day; but as the dawn is of course later in appearing there than in the plain, and the sun also sets proportionately earlier, the length of the days—more especially in the winter time—is somewhat curtailed, a circumstance which is not calculated to give the place a cheerful aspect. But a profusion of wild-flowers and creeping plants—many of them of gay colours—growing in the clefts of the rocks, thus covering a part of their ruggedness, and gracefully concealing the extreme harshness of their bold outlines, greatly relieved the gloom. A number of birds, attracted to this sheltered spot, also enlivened it with their brisk movements and joyous notes. One part of the valley is somewhat wider than the rest; and the ground here having recently been cleared of the masses of rock and loose stones which encumber it elsewhere, there stands—however incongruous it may appear in such a place—a *factory*, built of stone, and the machinery in which is set in motion by a large water-wheel turned by the gurgling stream. At a short distance from the factory is a house in the Swiss-cottage style, having a newly-made garden in front, as yet rather bare of vegetation. In this garden, and looking towards the factory, stand a gentleman and lady—Mr and Mrs Harebell.

Mr Harebell, who might be about five-and-forty

years of age, was well-favoured, having a broad, intellectual-looking forehead, and his whole countenance beaming with intelligence, bearing the impress, too, of very extraordinary powers of mind, united to a child-like simplicity of character.

Mrs Harebell, now approaching forty, was still a very comely person, or rather, still very pretty, with such a kindly, cheery, happy face as was a pleasure to look upon. She was the first to speak, saying :

"How clever you are, Alaric—how very clever you are, to have planned and done all this so well, and in so short a time ! How fortunate it was, too, that you could have this ground so cheap, the place being, as it is, so exceedingly snug and sheltered."

"Why, as to the situation," remarked Mr Harebell, hesitatingly, and rather anxiously, "I don't know—I don't feel quite easy about it. You and the girls may find it very dull ; and——"

"Oh ! pray, don't torment yourself with such needless fears," broke in Mrs Harebell. "We shall be much too busy to feel *dull*, take my word for it," she said. "How fine the air is ! and what an agreeable odour of wild thyme ! and how sweetly the birds are singing !—at least to judge of their songs by so much as the noise of the water-wheel will permit us to hear." She smilingly added : "But, I can assure you, that the splashing of that water-wheel is far more agreeable to my ears at present than would be the sweetest music."

"Yes," said her husband, "I understand that, for so it is to mine—telling of difficulties overcome, and giving hope for the future of prosperous industry and

its consequences—comfort and independence. You look upon the matter in a right way; in a *cheerful, hopeful, right way*," he said. "We must now try to make the best of it, which I feel sure *you* will do. And that is a great comfort and encouragement to me to know," he said, affectionately taking the hand that she had laid on his shoulder.

It is not necessary to enter into any of the details of what had led Mr Harebell, an Englishman, to purchase land and erect a factory in Alsace, as they are immaterial to this narrative. Suffice it to say, that he had thought fit so to do; and the whole had been completed, the house also built, only a short time before he has been introduced to the reader.

The family consisted, besides Mr and Mrs Harebell, of their eldest son, Christopher, now approaching twenty years of age—of a slow, quiet, thoughtful disposition, not at all like his father, to whom, however, he was of great assistance; Lilian and Maud, girls of from sixteen to eighteen—Lilian, handsome, high-spirited, and rather passionate, but generous and affectionate—Maud, pretty, timid, irresolute, and rather inclined to artifice, through cowardice, although, being strictly honourable and upright at heart, she blamed herself severely, and suffered acutely, whenever she had been guilty of any such meanness, as was owing much more to the effect of weakness of character than want of principle. Next in age came Walter and Jasper, boys of from ten to twelve; and lastly, Bertha, a very sweet and lovely child of five years of age, and the pet and darling of the whole family.



CHAPTER II.

“ Meeting with Time—Slack thing, said I,
Thy scythe is dull; whet it for shame.
No marvel, Sir, he did reply,
If it at length deserve some blame :
But where one man would have me grind it,
Twenty for one too sharp do find it.

• • • • •
For where thou only wert before
An executioner at best,
Thou art a gardn’er now, and more.”

GEORGE HERBERT.

MR HAREBELL had no easy task before him as a cotton-spinner in this secluded place in Alsace. Aided by an overlooker of but very inferior capacity, he had to instruct the work-people, new to the employment, and very inapt at learning ; and, moreover, as stupidly obstinate and proudly self-opinionated, as very ignorant people so often are.

The greater part of them were extremely indigent, gaining a very scanty subsistence by working on the land, and living in such a way as in England would

be thought wretchedly poor and comfortless, suffering innumerable hardships and miseries from their extreme poverty, and having at best such a bare maintenance, they were not in the habit of laying anything by. Nor could it be expected; and therefore, in cases of sickness or misfortune, there being no workhouse or any such institution in the neighbourhood, their only choice was to beg or starve.

And, besides, little remunerative as was their labour in the land, it was very far from affording a sufficiency of employment for the bulk of the population in the locality. The consequence of which was, that in a family of six or eight persons capable of earning, one-half that number might perhaps be regularly employed, whilst the remainder had little or nothing to do.

One would have been led to suppose that in such a place to establish a means of providing the people with an abundance of much more lucrative employment than any they had hitherto been able to obtain—which the working of a factory in Mossdale would effect to a very considerable degree—would be unanimously regarded by them as a great and notable benefit, and hailed with gladness; but it was only by a few of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood that it was looked upon in any such light, whilst the others were inclined to regard it with distrust and suspicion as an unwelcome innovation, and to look upon Mr Harebell with rather hostile feelings as an impertinent intruder.

In order somewhat to lighten his labours—some-