



Helbeck

Mrs. Humphry Ward

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Mrs Ward, a famous agnostic who throughout her life criticized Anglican orthodoxy, makes a leap of faith to portray a highly religious Catholic. Helbeck is the devout Catholic bachelor owner of a rundown estate, the estate of an ancient Catholic family, much persecuted over the centuries by Protestants. He is stripping the house of everything of value to support his Catholic charities. His recently widowed sister arrives, with a daughter -- they are destitute and dependent on Helbeck. The daughter, Laura, taught skepticism by her father, holds Helbeck and his religion in contempt. During her stay with Helbeck she makes contact with relatives of her father who live nearby in the isolated region -- North England hill-billies. This family are extreme Dissenter fundamentalist Protestants who have a long-standing hatred of Helbeck. Mrs Ward's portrait of these ignorant people is striking. Helbeck assumes responsibility for the young Laura, over her objections, to protect her from these unsavory people. Naturally, a love grows between Helbeck, who resists mightily as it disturbs his celibate piety, and Laura, who resists as she cannot imagine marrying a Catholic. Mrs Ward did a lot of research to get the Catholic theme right. (Her father moved from Anglican to Catholic and back several times: she struggled to avoid offending him with this story.) She produced a compelling story of the conflict and its inevitable denouement.

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