

THE STORY OF BESSIE COSTRELL

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The story of Bessie Costrell by Mrs. Humphry Ward

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MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

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BESSIE COSTRELL**



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OF
BESSIE COSTRELL

BY

MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

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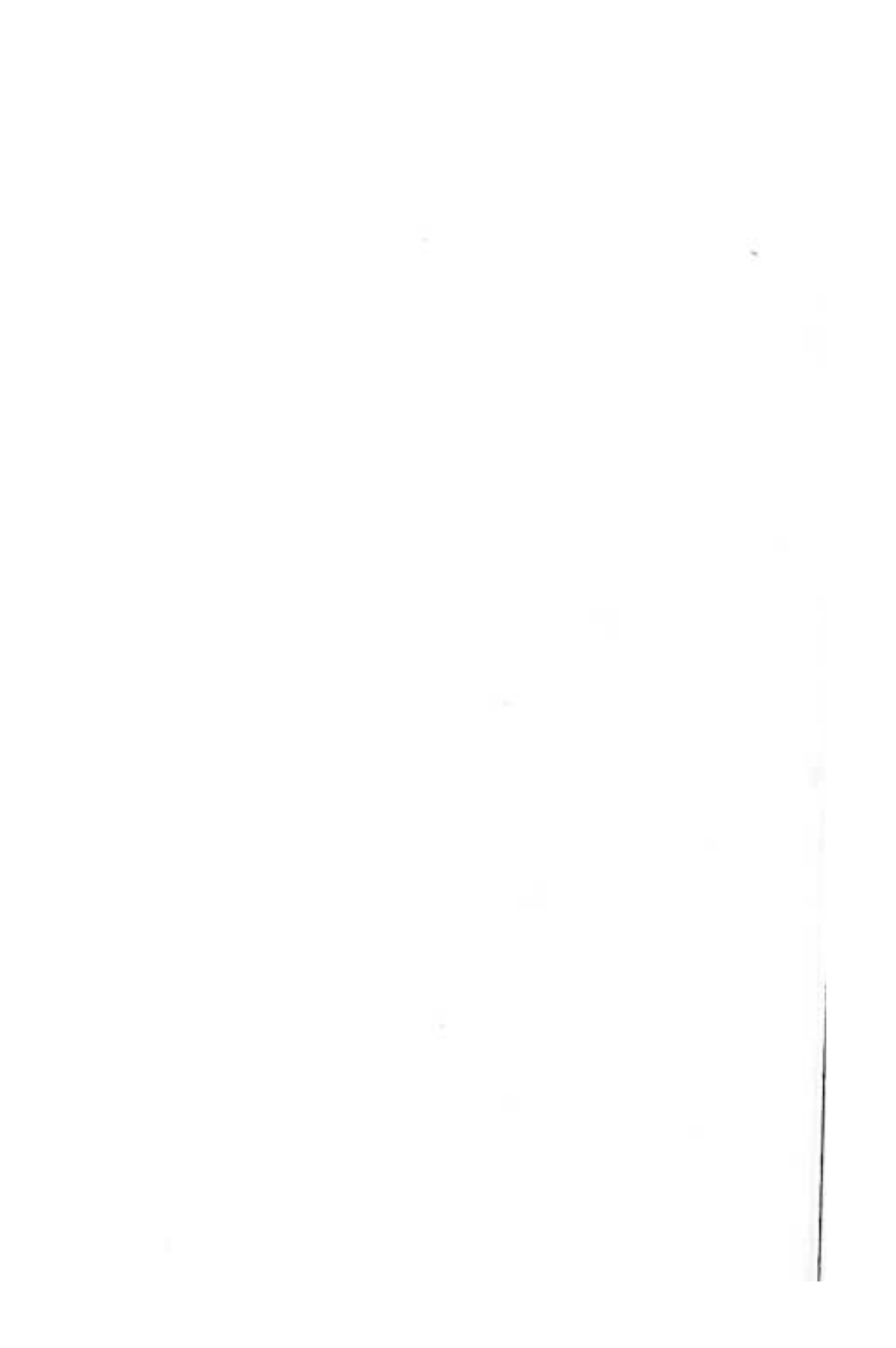
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SCENE I

ENGLISH



THE STORY OF BESSIE COSTRELL

SCENE I

It was an August evening, still and cloudy after a day unusually chilly for the time of year. Now, about sunset, the temperature was warmer than it had been in the morning, and the departing sun was forcing its way through the clouds, breaking up their level masses into delicate latticework of golds and greys. The last radiant light was on the wheat fields under the hill, and on the long chalk hill itself. Against that glowing background lay the village, already engulfed by the advancing

shadow. All the nearer trees, which the daylight had mingled in one green monotony, stood out sharp and distinct, each in its own plane, against the hill. Each natural object seemed to gain a new accent, a more individual beauty, from the vanishing and yet lingering sunlight.

An elderly labourer was walking along the road which led to the village. To his right lay the allotment gardens just beginning to be alive with figures, and the voices of men and children. Beyond them, far ahead, rose the square tower of the church; to his left was the hill, and straight in front of him the village, with its veils of smoke lightly brushed over the trees, and its lines of cottages climbing the chalk steeps behind it. His eye as he walked took in a number of such facts as life had trained it to notice. Once he stopped to bend over a fence,

to pluck a stalk or two of oats; he examined them carefully, then he threw back his head and sniffed the air, looking all round the sky meanwhile. Yes, the season had been late and harsh, but the fine weather was coming at last. Two or three days' warmth now would ripen even the oats, let alone the wheat.

Well, he was glad. He wanted the harvest over. It would, perhaps, be his last harvest at Clinton Magna, where he had worked, man and boy, for fifty-six years come Michaelmas. His last harvest! A curious pleasure stirred the man's veins as he thought of it, a pleasure in expected change, which seemed to bring back the pulse of youth, to loosen a little the yoke of those iron years that had perforce aged and bent him; though, for sixty-two, he was still hale and strong.

Things had all come together. Here