

The
Wargale North
Collection

FAIR KITTY OF FAIR HARBOR

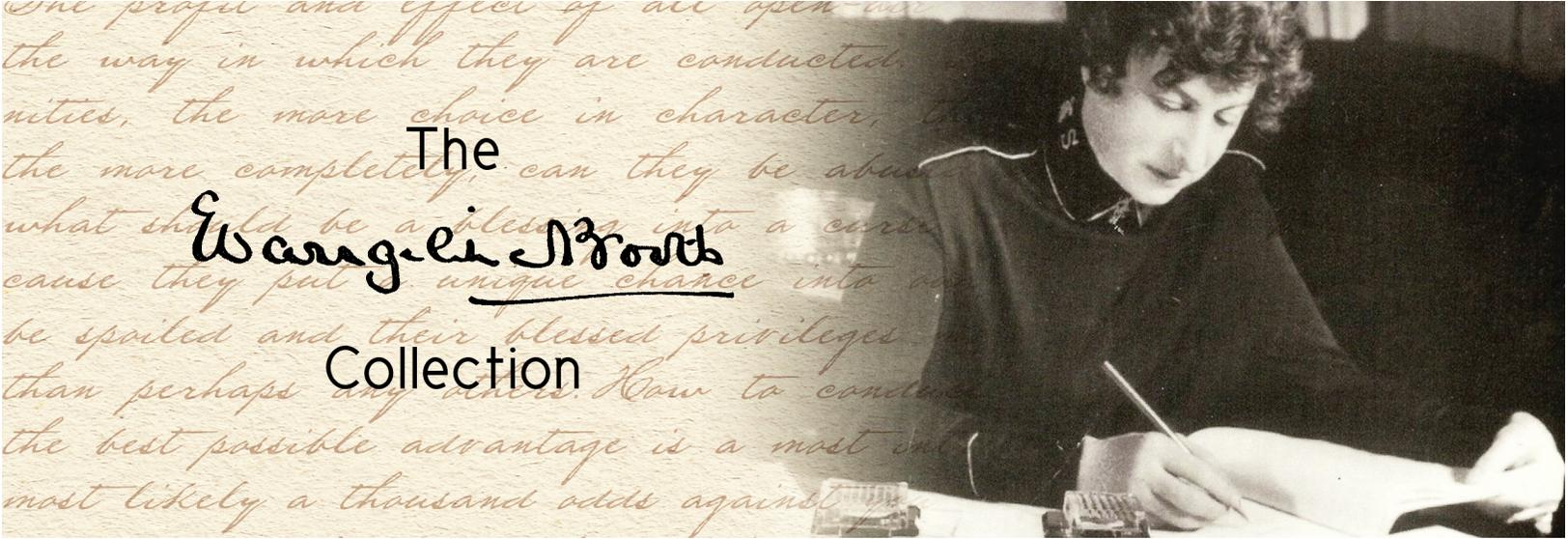
Fair Kitty was the fairest thing in all Fair Harbor. From the salty mornings when she ran down the Quay with bouncing locks and bare feet reminding one of pink shells to see the fish in father's boat, to the later Golden days when in her dainty simplicity she reigned Queen among the crowd of young folk waving the fishermen home, Kitty was the pride and pet of the village.

Both boys and girls, the aged and the children, all loved her, and she was called "the flower of Fair Harbor." If the little head was turned by the tide of admiration which daily swept over her as generously as the waves lapped the harbor rocks, who could wonder?

But there came a night, black as pitch and hideous with the roar of the wind and the booming of the sea, which brought one of those tragedies so dreaded by the homes on a dangerous post. When the dawn broke, the relentless waves lashing the shore under heavily burdened skies sullenly gave up their dead, and poor little Kitty was fatherless. No grief leaves us just as it finds us, and the tears which flowed from the gay blue eyes, and the desolation which passed upon the young bright heart quickly developed her gracious womanhood. But the fair face lost none of its charm, and by the time Kitty was sixteen, as Mrs. Pawson put it "all the lads were clean crazy over her." Mrs. Pawson Being the village postmistress as well as the village gossip, whose store was the junction towards which all news roads, turned, may be regarded as an authority and she it was who volunteered a key to the one mysterious step in Kitty's life.

"Them as knows best blames her least," said Mrs. Pawson, critically inspecting an unusual postmark upon the mail she was sorting. "It's not to be expected that the girl would pick up one of the pebbles that's been thrown on her threshold since she wore pinneys. besides, she's got neither kin nor fortune, and if her pretty face has brought her a bit of money in it, with a good home, I for one am glad to hear it, for she's the darlinest little soul that –" and Mrs. Pawson screwed the top of the mailbag with a twist that cut off the conversation, leaving herself as usual the luxury of the last word.

But to Kitty, herself, Mrs. Pawson spoke in a different strain. She had known her mother; it was her arms that held the baby to the lips of the dying woman For that kiss death alone can give to



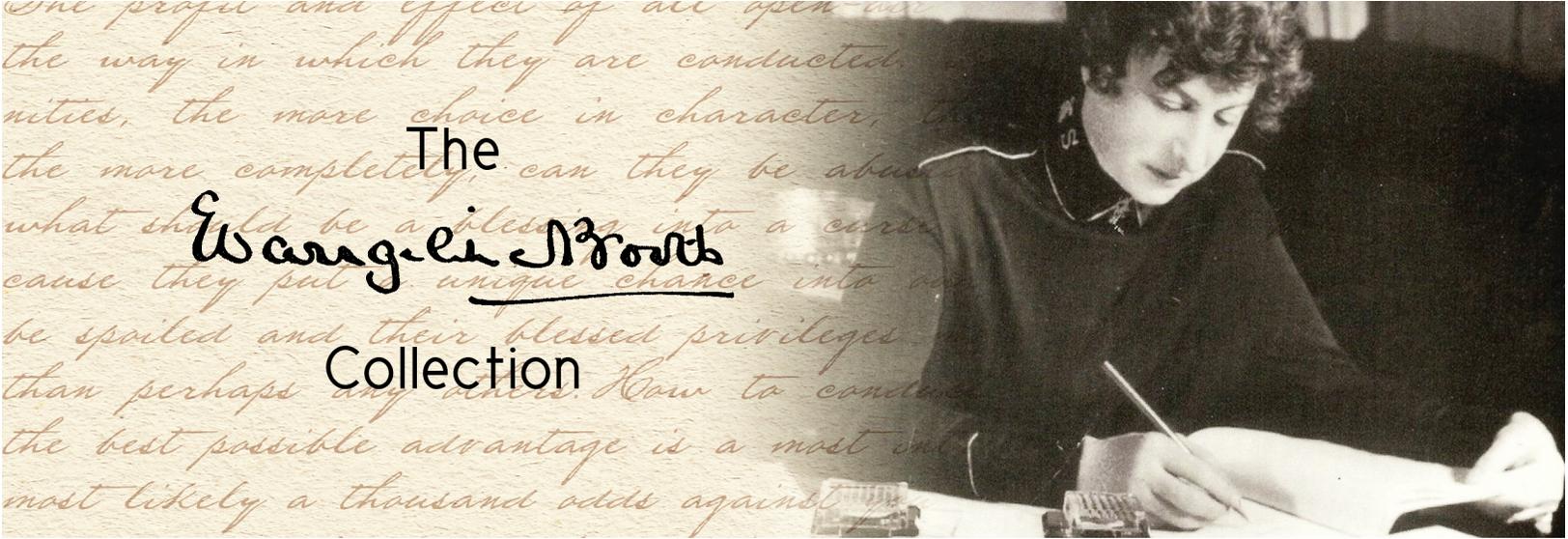
the living it leaves behind, and it was Mrs. Pawson who said Amen to the prayer: "Oh, Lord, care for and protect my little one," and she had loved the "motherless pretty thing", as she called her through all our sixteen years, hence the news of her engagement to George Taggart, a well-to-do ship owner of good appearance but unproved character, had come as a blow to the motherly heart that was concealed but not by any means obliterated by the very sharp tongue.

"You're too good a girl to be satisfied with anything but the best, dearie," set the postmistress, when at last she had Kitty to herself, and it's not always the gayest colors that were the best. Besides, he's not a Christian, Kitty and I fear your poor father would have been ill pleased with that, although he was not one to despise a bit laid away. But you know I always say it's a poor home, no matter how broad the staircase or how big the jumping box to lift you up in, that hasn't God in it. Don't let the glitter blind your eyes, little girl, and forgive my queer ways of putting it, but unless you're sure that he loves God, I'd have nothing to do with him. Trouble will come."

Kitty's eyes held tears that were hot, and her lips quivered as she said, "I know you speak because you love me, and not in spite, as Mary Cott's mother does, and I know George isn't a Christian now, — but he says I can do anything I like with him, and that if I marry him he will be ever so good, and that he will shortly go to church with me if I want him to. Why, He says he's that fond of me that he'll do anything to please me, and you know it'll be lovely to be taken care of again, and have nice clothes, and have not have to work, and not be lonely anymore. Since dear father died, it has been so desolate, the empty cottage, and my empty heart and —"

The sobbing remainder of the sentence was smothered upon Mrs. Pawson's ample bosom, and as sadly so often pity supplanted judgment, and Mrs. Pawson said as she patted the fair head, "There, child, I guess it will be alright; it's yourself that's got to be satisfied, so it's yourself that must decide."

The wedding was a great sensation in Fair Harbor. Haul upon haul of good fish was lost, for Kitty's humble friends for her father's sake and her own almost to a man took a day's holiday in her honor. The bridegroom was somewhat annoyed by the strong flavor of brine which predominated in the audience, but he swallowed it with the bluff congratulations with the best grace possible.



"You are popular alright, Kitty," he said as they drove to the railway Depot, "but I'm just as pleased we've seen the last of Fair Harbor. Your old friends, you know, won't fit in with your new life."

Kitty did not at that excited moment realize the full meaning of the words, yet was conscious of the spreading of an indefinable shadow over the brilliance of her wedding day.

Five years later, and the fisherman's daughter is scarcely recognizable in the woman in her costly gown and elegant room. A gold tint of hair and exquisite contour of face is the same, yet there are delicate lines about the eyes and lips which tell of feeling depressed and perhaps of tears shed. Her voice had a new ring — such a plaintive note — as she looks up at her frowning husband, exclaiming:

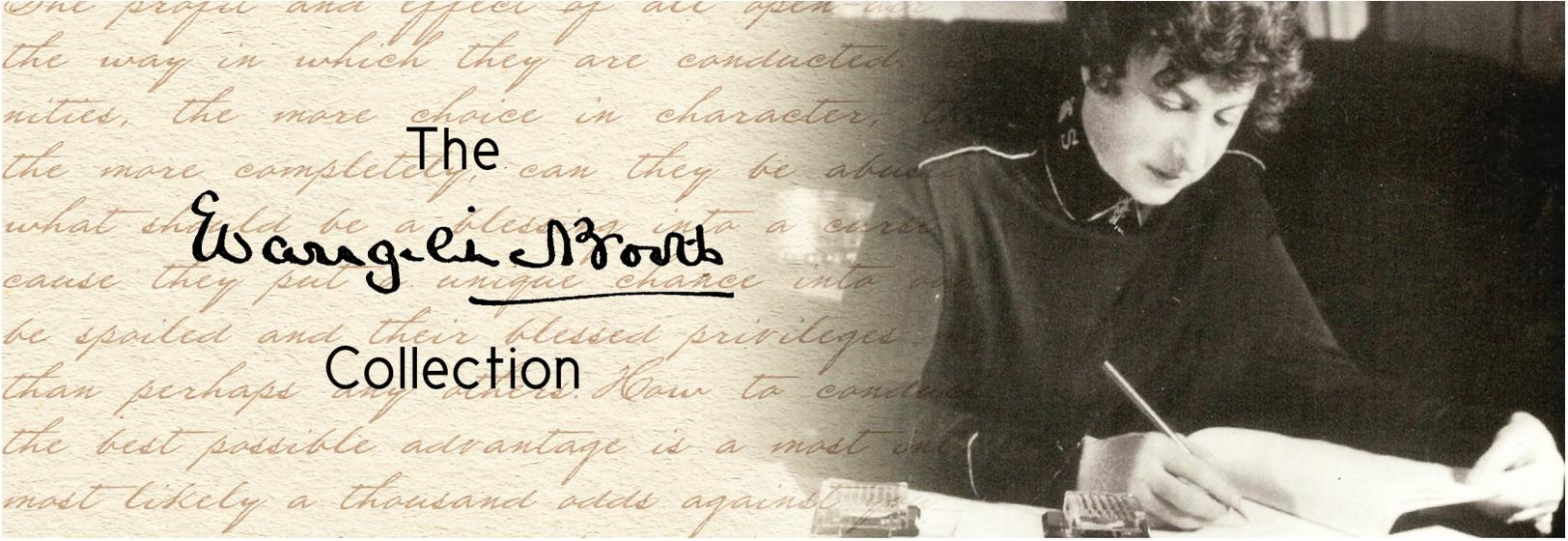
"But, George, you promised!"

"Promised!" There was an ugly sneer in the word and the face. "Then I was a fool to promise, and you were a fool to believe me. Don't you know that promises before the wedding day are made to be broken? Ha! Ha!" Laughing at his course joke. "Go to church — I will be hanged if I will."

The man had already turned on his heel, but the young wife felt she must make a more desperate appeal, and a rising to her feet, she cried:

"Oh, George, don't turn from me that way. Stay and let us talk a while, as we used to do. You seem so strange lately to have so changed, as though you scarcely loved me anymore. You are home so little, and you never want to see the children. Then — then it is such a long time since you have given me any money, And I don't know what to do with the unpaid bills."

"Go and work and pay them yourself. It will do you good. I guess my fortune is as much a farce as your religion, and the quicker you know it the better — and what's more I'm tired of your dull ways and poky notions." With a heavy slam the door closed behind him, and the little wife, with ashy pale cheeks, crouched half stunned under the stinging flow. Yet, strange to say, it was not



the last cruel words which hurt most, but the terrible truth of that taunt. "As much a farce as your religion."

Kitty looked back over her life in the big city, over her growing love for dress and show, over her thirst for worldly amusement, over her worried perfunctory prayers, over her neglected friends of humbler days, over the unopened Bible which was her mother's, over Mrs. Pawson's words that the man she was to marry was not a Christian, and that trouble would come, and with the bitterness of an awakened conscience and an aching head and a breaking heart she buried her white face in her hands, which grew daily thinner, and cried, with only the little baby to hear, "Oh, I went away and left God, and now God has gone away and left me!"

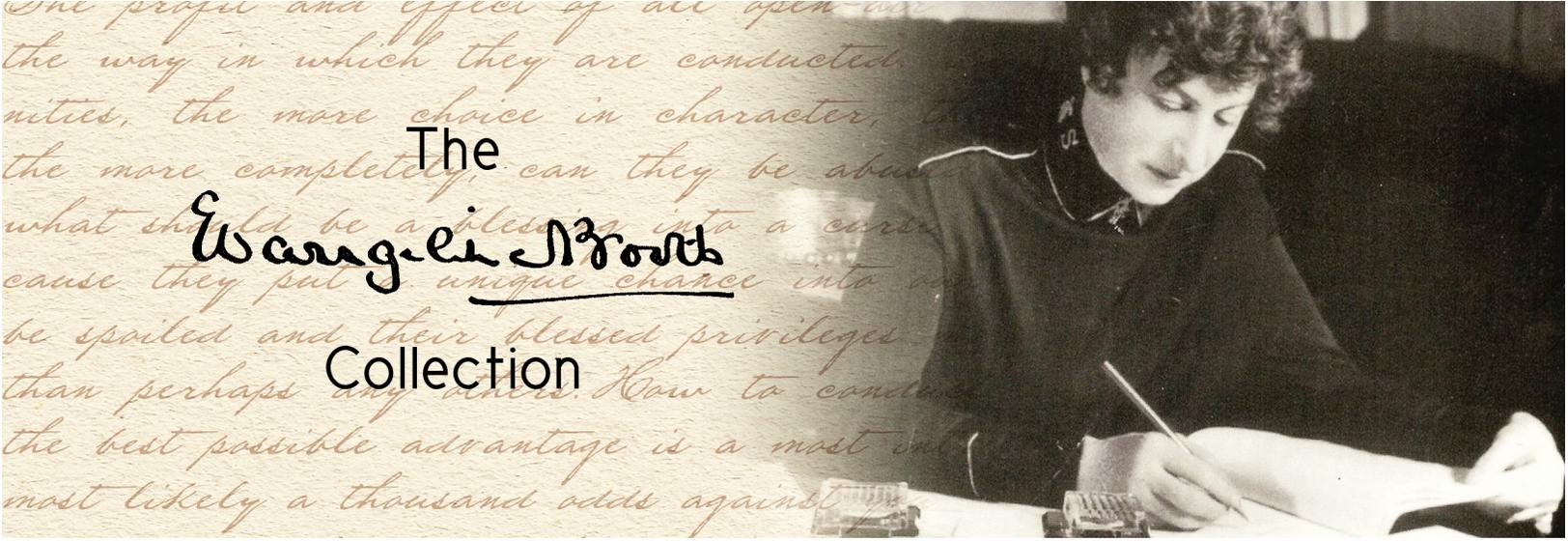
Soon the end came. One night, when Kitty waited for the step which had been so unsteady of late and the voice which had spoken so little that was not of insult, a sharp-ring instead of the fumbling latchkey sent her startled to the door. A messenger boy handed her a note and was gone. Under the hall lamp she opened and read the scrawled lines:

"You needn't expect me again, because tonight ends all between us. I'm sick of your grave face and the growls of the kids. I found someone a little more cheerful, and we're going to cheat old time out of a jolly year or two yet. Good luck and goodbye. You needn't look for me, for I'm not to be found."

The note dropped to the ground — there was a pitiful cry, a stretching out of two empty hands into the thickening darkness and then a heavy fall. It was the soft kisses of their little three-year-old girl and the child's wailing which brought Kitty back to consciousness.

But realizations were many and bitter on the morrow. Kitty found herself not only deserted but absolutely destitute. Heavy losses following foolish speculation and delirious gambling had drained their resources to the last dollar. For months the little home had been tottering upon ruin — now it fell, leaving Kitty and her babies homeless and friendless.

There were some who offered her shelter, but with the disgrace of desertion upon her, and the memory of their earlier taunts as to her humble origin made to discredit her beauty, she could

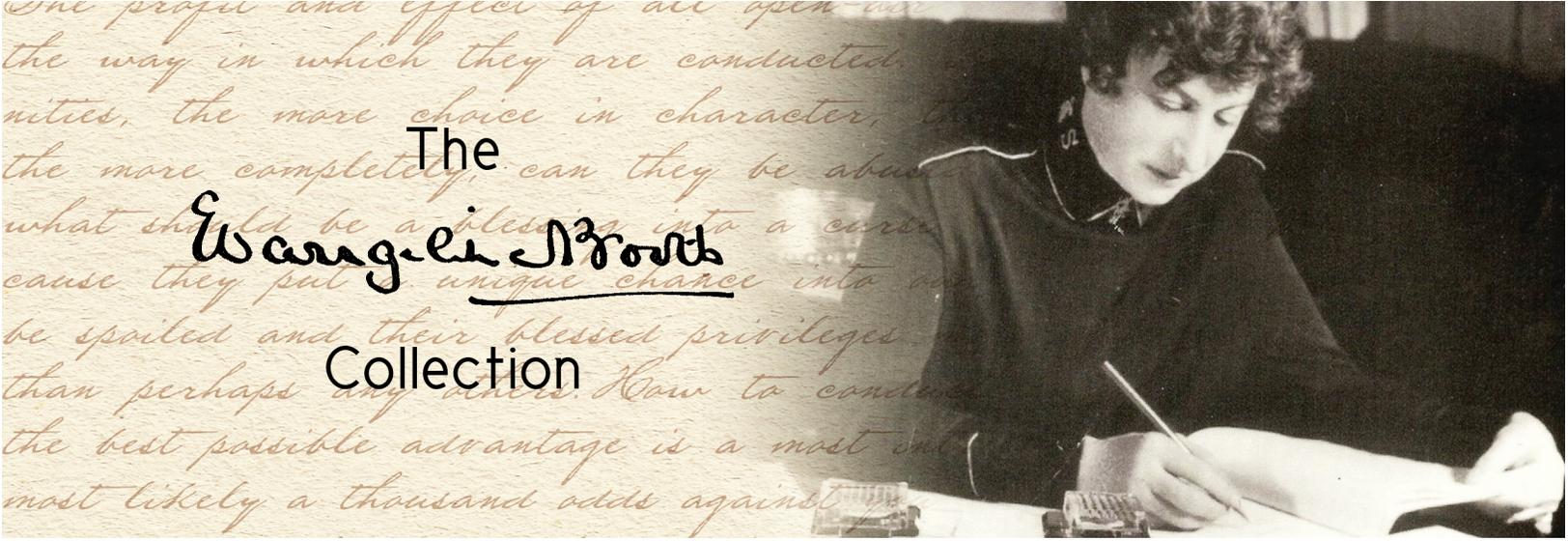


not tolerate their pity, let alone their charity, and so one cold morning as she gathered her baby in her arms and with her little three-year-old daughter she passed out of the home into the lights and pretty comforts of which she had entered with such heart throbs of happy expectation a few years back. She only had a few dollars of her own — Just enough for cab fare to a distant and dreary suburb of the city and a week's rent of one dismal room.

Then ensued one of those quick transformations from affluence to poverty possible only in a great metropolis, but which when they come to the helpless rarely fail to break the hearts and almost turn the brain. Kitty was one of the helpless — she had never learned to “shift for herself”. There was little work she knew how to do, and less she could do with two babies to care for. Then, too, she was not strong; when the winter fell sickness seized her; the sewing she had undertaken had to be left undone, her employer in anger refused to give her more — and soon they were starving. The few jewels she had saved, a few good clothes she had worn on the day of their flight, went one by one for rent and bread. Now nothing was left; the last hard crust had been soaked in water for the children, and they were crying for more; she herself was hungry. What could she do? Where could she turn for help? There was no help but that which death could bring, and that must be near. Her head was giddy, her breath was quick, her hands were hot. The thought that death might come to her and not to the children gave birth to a strange fancy, wild and strong. She would go home — go home to die, and the babies would go home to die with her. But how to pay for the journey? She looked around the bare room from which she expected eviction on the morrow, and then down at her threadbare skirts, nothing that would fetch their fare. Yes, there was one thing yet — one thing — her wedding ring — to this she had clung, for it was the passport of her respectability. It had taken her from Fair Harbor — from happiness — from true love and from God; now she would see if it would take her back.

She laid it on the counter that night; her stifled sobs stirred a smoldering ember of pity in the heart of the salesman, and he gave her a better price for it than the otherwise would have been inclined to do.

Of that journey, Kitty never remembered anything. It was all a blur of strange faces, shrieking engine, wailing infant, aching head and gnawing hunger. When at last the train pulled into the little familiar depot, senses were nearly numb, but as in a dream she got the children off the car



and stood once more upon the platform she had left little less than five years since as a bride. They were the only passengers to alight; at that hour the usual Depot loungers were at supper, and in the darkness the now almost fainting woman with the pretty children got away unobserved.

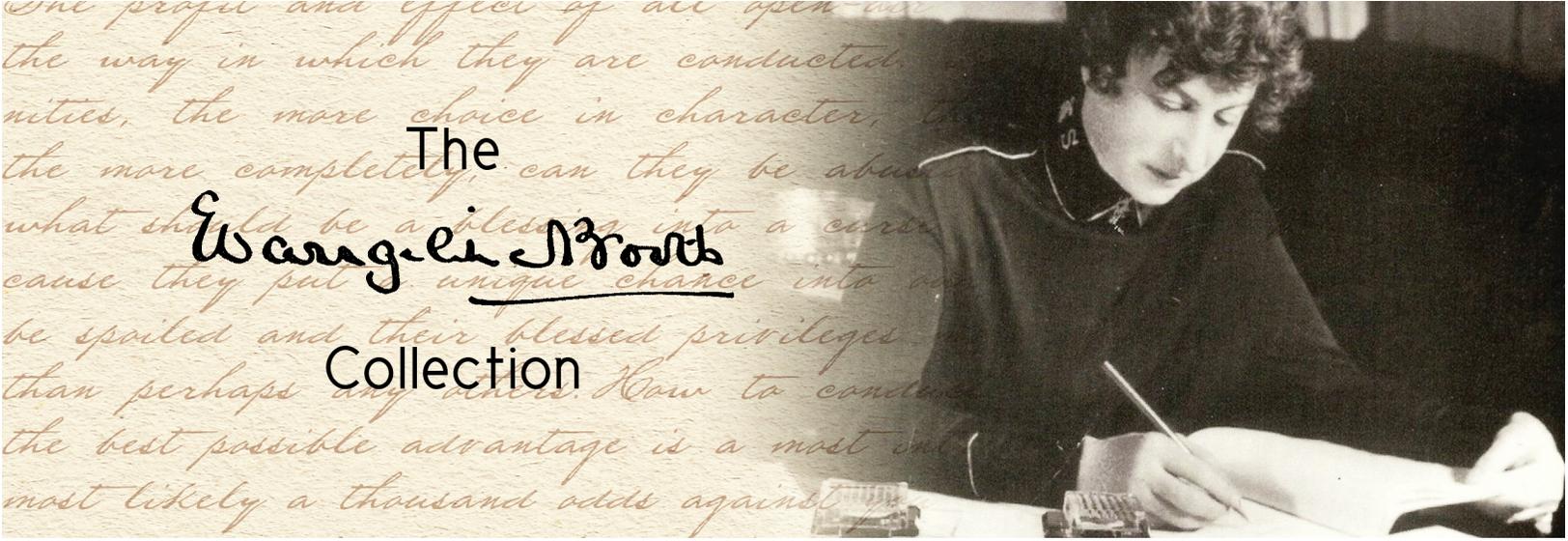
Kitty had no plans — no path. Aimlessly her feet altered through the familiar streets, shrinking into the shadow as a footstep sounded. Oh, what a coming back! Then a sharp breeze struck her face, the familiar salt was laid on her parched lips, the rough stones over the causeway became sodden wood, and Kitty found she had unconsciously followed her girlhood's favorite haunt — the fishing quay. The boats were all drawn up for the night, the fishermen resting at their home anchors, and the wanderers had it to themselves save for the waters below, which years back had loved to caress her little pink feet, now waiting still to befriend her in resting her despairing heart. The baby was fast asleep now, but little Kitty cried, frightened at the darkness and asking again and again if they would "soon go home."

"Yes, darling," said the mother, "we're nearly there now, it may be a bit cold going in, but Kitty will be quite warm all the time after. Mother will put Kitty through the door first, and then mother and baby will follow." she had saved her remaining strength to the task of giving the child first to the waves, and then throwing it over herself and the infant, who still slept, unconscious how's the cold waters waiting for it below.

There was a light coming down the street, and voices behind it. It was now or never, and the thin fingers grasped the child's frame with a force that made her screen. Instantaneously with the action a clear voice rang out from the head of the Quay, where the light and moving figures had halted:

Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidst me come to thee,
Oh, Lamb of God, I come.

While the verse was sung, the mother stood as if petrified, her hand still upon the child, astonishment and awe upon her pinched features, but when the little throng took up the refrain,



fear and shame were forgotten and with shaking steps she drew nearer until within a few feet of the Army open air. Seeing a face in the crowd that she knew, she stumbled and fell.

When Kitty came to herself she was in a little room, the comfort and stuffiness of which seemed strangely familiar. The little Kitty was seated before the stove, working her patient way through a huge bowl of bread and milk. The baby seemed cooing behind her and Kitty attempted to turn to look for it. There seemed a terrible weight on her head, and she could not lift it; then a kind voice sounded in her ear and the sphere-like countenance of Mrs. Pawson framed in an Army bonnet three sizes too small sprang into view.

"Don't you try to stir. The precious mite's all right, and you soon will be. Where are you? Why in the post office parlor, of course! Don't try to talk — sup this drop of broth — there'll be lots of time later to tell me anything you have a mind to. And if you don't want to tell me then I don't want to hear — how's that for an old gossip? Head a little higher, dearie? Bless its golden curls, and bless the dear old Army for finding you for us again! You didn't know it had come to town, and that I'd gone into the work myself. Good thing I did, or I'd never have been on that quay-head tonight apart from the meeting, and me thinking it was damp for my rheumatism, and nearly staying indoors and missing you — no, finding you, I mean. Sure, it's all mixed I am tonight, but it's sure you're here, and I'm here, and the great friend of all broken, sorrowing hearts is here. And I believe your Angel mother who put you into my arms twenty-one years ago, with that prayer for God to protect you, is here; and just as God through the blessed Army has answered tens of thousands of mothers' prayers, he has surely answered hers."

And weak as Kitty was, she whispered, "Bring the little children close up to me, and let us all pray, and with father and mother in the skies thank Him!"

And so The Army goes on with its great work of saving mortal lives and immortal souls for the world round. Sometimes at the quay, or the bridge at point of death, sometimes on starvation's pallet of straw, sometimes in blaze of electric light at the theater entrance. Oh, that we had more money and prayer in sympathy, to help it go faster in finding and saving the lost!