

THE DAYS OF BRUCE:

A STORY FROM SCOTTISH HISTORY,—BY GRACE AGUILAR.

THAT what is popularly termed the "light literature" of the present day, is exercising more than a passing influence on the spirit of the age, may, appear, if we may so speak, to be bound up with its wants, its aims, its tendencies,—is a fact that few will now be prepared to dispute. Despite the attempts that have been made to bring the torrent of popular opinion to bear against such publications, and the efforts of some, who, we fear, scarcely perceive the difference between religion and the cant of religion, or recognize the distinction between an humble reverence for the great truths of Scripture, and that coarse familiarity with sacred things, which is busy on the lip, and idle at the heart. Works of fiction, having, indeed, for their aim, the highest and noblest objects, are rapidly and wonderfully increasing. Again and again, it has been rumoured that philosophy was about to extirpate those productions of so-called frivolous writers; but we have ever thought her too conversant with the features of her sister, wisdom, to venture on such a crusade; or fail to recognize her and acknowledge her influences, even under the subtlest disguises she may sometimes see fit to assume,—ay, in the very disguises, too, from which the ignorant and superficial have disdainfully turned; albeit, had they received her, veiled as she was, they might, unawares, have entertained an angel of truth!

Of course, by the term fiction, we understand simply the illustration, by example and graphic description, of the truths or qualities, feeling, sentiments or circumstances which the author intends to represent; and consider it thus, not only as not opposed to truth, but as one of the best *media* for its communication. And that this reasoning is not mere assumption, the early impressions of each one of us will prove; for, who is there that cannot retrace a long-growing dislike and fear of some particular fault, or a still-strengthening approval of an opposite virtue, to the vivid effect produced by a well-written tale? Both virtue and fault, perhaps, had been set before us a hundred times; but it was not till we saw the one exemplified in the conduct of a good girl, or the consequences of the other pictured in the misery of a naughty boy, that either wrought upon us any degree of that influential impression which has since grown with our growth and strengthened with our strength. To our nursery, and its oft-told tales, some of our strongest impressions of right and wrong may be traced; and

for our first lessons on the advantages of patience, industry, and all sorts of virtues, we shall find ourselves indebted to many a delicious fairy tale, read while nestling under the sunny trees of our childhood's garden, or in a snug corner by the winter hearth of our early days. And not even in maturer years does fiction lose its influence. Have we not often found the moral truth, or the moral quality, which, in its abstract nature, has scarcely been apprehended by us, startling us into attention, fixing itself with powerful grasp on all our faculties, when clothed in its developed attributes,—when embodied in a real character? If, indeed, it be true, that "a verse may sometimes win him who a sermon flies," just as true is it, that a well-conceived, and well-executed fiction may win over, at least to the approval of excellence, many who would shrink from studying precept in the abstract, or duty in detail.

It is doubtless to be regretted that, like most other agencies which are all under man's control, fiction has been perverted to base and ignoble purposes. Vices, which in themselves are very fiends of darkness, decked in fiction's robes, have walked the world as angels of light. Fiction has thereby been made a minister to evil passions, and her works have been constructed as a vestibule leading through deception to wickedness. Still, to repeat the trite maxim, the abuse of anything is no argument against its right use. The greater the power, and the more extensive the capabilities of an instrument, the more cogent are the reasons for rescuing it from the service of evil, and employing it as an agent of good. It can surely be no unworthy task to follow the precept of one of the ancient wise, and "join both profit and delight in one," and that it can be accomplished, the works of Scott, Cooper, Maryatt, and Dickens abundantly prove. These, though each the type of a peculiar style, and bringing before us scenes and characters, as widely different and distinct as can be imagined, have one and the same end in view,—to exalt our conceptions of human nature, to strengthen our love for the good, the beautiful, and the true, and teach us practically that nobility of soul, and purity, honour, and truth, do not of right, or alone, pertain to the proud and haughty, but are to be found in the cottage of the peasant, shining often more resplendently than in the palace of the prince. And in the wake of these and other great names, have followed, though it may be but at an humble distance, many a talented and gifted writer; until the novel has become one of the highest efforts, and most popular vehicles of thought, feeling, and observation.