

keep him ; maybe he'll be a second Burns, and, anyway, we'll never miss his bite and sup. If ye like to take the bother o' him, ye can."

So the matter was settled, and that afternoon John and Mary Fletcher returned to their home on Spital Water a good deal richer than when they had left it not forty-eight hours before.

John Fletcher was quite a person of note in the little Border town where his family had lived for many generations. They belonged originally to Haddington, but there had always been Fletchers in the employment of the Bremners of Halliwell Mills, and it is not too much to say that the interests of Halliwell had always been as dear to the Fletchers as to the Bremners.

Some well-meaning and disinterested persons who had read the collected poems of John Fletcher, and who appeared to see something incongruous between the bent of his mind and his occupation, had busied themselves in trying to find him some more congenial work ; but John, while thanking them kindly, had declined to leave the town of his birth, and the pretty little rose-covered cottage on the banks of the Spital Water where he had been born. He had no fault to find with his occupation, indeed, he loved the great mills, and the rush and roar of their machinery was as music in his ears, inspiring some of his finest lines. He did pretty much as seemed right in his own eyes at Halliwell, for he was so highly respected and absolutely trusted by his employers that they did not treat him altogether like a servant. It was a trust which was never abused ; for though John Fletcher was a poet he was a workman first, and never neglected his daily duties to follow the vagaries of his mind.