



"TO RAISE THE GENIUS AND TO MEND THE HEART."

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## POPULAR TALES.

## EXPIATION.

Margaret Burnside was an orphan. Her parents, who had been the poorest people in the parish, had died when she was a mere child; and as they had left no near relatives, there were few or none to care much about the desolate creature, who might be well said to have been left friendless in the world. True, that the feeling of charity is seldom wholly wanting in any heart; but it is generally but a cold feeling among hard-working folk, towards objects out of the narrow circle of their own family affections, and selfishness has a ready and strong excuse in necessity. There seems, indeed, to be a sort of chance in the lot of the orphan offspring of paupers. On some the eye of christian benevolence falls at the very first moment of their uttermost destitution—and their worst sorrows, instead of beginning, terminate with the tears shed over their parent's graves. They are taken by the hands, as soon as they have been stretched out for protection, and admitted as inmates into households, whose doors, had their fathers and mothers been alive, they would never have darkened. The light of comfort falls upon them during the gloom of grief, and attends them all their days. Others, again, are overlooked at the first fall of affliction, as if in some unaccountable fatality; the wretchedness with which all have become familiar, no one very tenderly pities; and thus the orphan reconciled herself to the extreme hardships of her condition, lives on uncheered by those sympathies out of which grow both happiness and virtue, and yielding by degrees to the constant pressure of her lot, becomes poor in spirit as in estate, and either vegetates like an almost worthless weed that is carelessly trodden on by every foot, or if by nature born a flower, in time loses her lustre, and all her days, not long, leads not so much the life of a servant as of a slave.

Such till she was twelve years old had been the fate of Margaret Burnside. Of a slender form and weak constitution, she had never been able for much work; and thus from one

discontented and harsh master and mistress to another, she had been transferred from house to house, always the poorest, till she came to be looked on as an incumbrance rather than a help in any family, and thought hardly worthy her bread. Sad and sickly she on the braes herding the kine. It was supposed that she was in a consumption, and as the shadow of death seemed to lie on the neglected creature's face, a feeling something like love was awakened towards her in the heart of pity, for which she showed her gratitude by still attending to all household tasks with an alacrity beyond her strength. Few doubted that she was dying, and it was plain that she tho't so herself; for the bible, which, in her friendlessness, she had always read more than other children, who were too happy to reflect often on the Word of that Being from whom their happiness flowed, was now, when leisure permitted, seldom or never out of her hands, and in lonely places, where there was no human ear to hearken, did the dying girl often support her heart when quaking in natural fears of the grave, by singing to herself hymns and psalms. But her hour was not yet come, though by the inscrutable decrees of Providence doomed to be hideous, and sad with almost inexpiable guilt. As for herself, she was innocent as the linnet that sang beside her in the broom, and innocent she was to be up to the last throbbings of her religious heart. When the sunshine fell on the leaves of her bible, the orphan seemed to see in the holy words, brightening through the radiance, assurances of forgiveness of all her sins, small sins indeed, yet to her humble and contrite heart exceeding great, and to be pardoned only by the intercession of Him who died for us on the tree. Often, when clouds were in the sky, and blackness covered the book, Hope died away from the discoloured page, and the lonely creature wept and sobbed over the doom denounced on all who sin, and repent not—whether in deed or in thought. And thus religion became in her an awful thing—till, in her resignation, she feared to die. But look on that flower by the hill-side path, withered, as it seems, beyond the power of sun and air,