

that in such a place, and under such a teacher, nothing could be learned—noting experienced—but an early foretaste of future misery. There is no picture of an Infant School—this is no part of its discipline. Never would I confine the little innocents within the walls of a prison-house,—never would I behold them trembling beneath the frown of a task-master. I would not curtail one of their infant joys, nor cut off one of their young pleasures. I would not mar their merry play, nor curb the glee that wanders in their little clubs. But I would mingle education with their joy and with their pleasures—health and lessons with their play,—and affection and forgiveness in their little bands. Thus their joys or their pleasures, their play and their companions, become their teachers. By an Infant School I would not mean a room where a hundred children may be crowded together in an unhealthy atmosphere. The situation and comforts of the school are almost as important as the nature of the instruction, or the character and disposition of the teacher. The situation should be airy and healthy, and the room well ventilated, with a small play-ground attached. For the play-ground is almost as necessary as the school, and both are regarded by the pupils as places of loved amusement, where the presence of the teacher inspires no terror, no restraint, but where he mingles in their sports and directs them as an elder playmate, who they regard him as such, and in return love him as a parent. And while all appears unrestrained mirth on the little yard, or the little green, and exercise gives play to the lungs, vigor to the system, and health to the blood, and the small gymnasium rings with the joy of the happy beings, no incident, however trifling, is suffered to pass unimproved, to “lead them from nature up to nature’s God,” to eradicate evil propensities, and cherish a love of truth, justice, mercy, and mutual love. Their sports, their tempers, their little wrongs or quarrels, all become moments in the hands of the teacher, to render his infant charge the future good men or the excellent women. The school-room is only changing the scene of amusement, and tasks which I remember were to me the very essence of purgatory, pain, and punishment, are rendered to them an exquisite pastime. The pence table they carol merrily to the tune of “Nancy Dawson.” With two or three sets of merry motions, they chaunt the formidable multiplication table, which affords them all the hilarity of chasing a butterfly, or romping on the meadow. Nothing is given them in the shape of a task, but every new lesson is a new pleasure. They are not so much taught by words, as by bringing the thing signified under their observation. I should be sorry if the objects of Infant Schools should ever be so perverted as to attempt making them nurseries for infant prodigies. I care no more for precocity of talent, than I do for a tree that has blossomed before its time, the fruit of which is sure not to be worth the gathering. The design of Infant Schools is not to make ignorant parents Cain of their children, but to make all parents happy in their children. It is not so much the quantity of what they learn that is to be regarded, as the quality of what they learn. They will learn cheerful obedience to their parents, their instructors, and their future masters;—they will learn the most important of all lessons to their after happiness, the government of their temper;—they will learn conscientiousness in all that they do;—they will learn sincerity;—they will learn habits of order, of cleanliness, and of courtesy;—they will learn method, and dislike confusion;—they will learn to bestow neatness, without vanity, on their persons; and order in all things. They will acquire a knowledge of geography, of the animal, the vege-

table, and the mineral kingdoms, not as words, but as things that exist, and of which they have an understanding. They will acquire much to amuse and delight the friends of their parents,—much to surround it with education and instruction. And instances have been, where they have been conveyed upon their hapling tongues, conviction and conversion to a parent’s heart; while their Maker, from the lips of babes and of sucklings, perfected praise. They will be taught to feel that there is ever in the midst of them, a God of love, of mercy, and of power, who is angry with the wicked every day. They will be taught to love the creatures He has framed, to know His word, and revere its precepts,—to love virtue for virtue’s sake. It may be urged that much of the good produced by Infant Schools will be afterwards destroyed, by their mingling in other schools, in riper years, with children whose passions have been permitted to run wild, and especially where evil examples may exist on the part of the parents. That these will have a prejudicial effect to a certain extent is not to be denied. But for them there is also a preventive and a remedy. The Infant School is the nursery of the Sabbath School, where all the good begun will be strengthened and confirmed. Great as the moral and religious change is, which Sabbath Schools have effected upon society, their effect would have been tenfold, had not the moral culture of the child been so unheeded before sending it to the school, and its heart so hardened by years, and neglect, as to render an abiding impression impossible. But religious instruction, whether implanted in our minds by our father’s fireside, in the Infant School, or the Sabbath School, will never be forgotten. It will not depart from us. We may endeavor to shake it off, but it will struggle with us as Jacob with the angel. It will be a whisper in our souls for ever. We may grow up, and we may mingle with the world, and we may cast our Bibles far from us,—and we may become wicked men and thoughtless women, but these whispers of eternal truth, though even thought to be forgotten by ourselves, will return and return again; and when we wander in solitude, or lie sleepless on our pillow in the darkness of midnight, they will rush back upon our guilty minds, in texts, in verses, and in chapters, long, long forgotten.

But to return to my history. I have said, that the first of my education was the sayings which I heard from the lips of my father and mother. They gave an inclination to my spirit, as the hand beneath the twig. They become to me as monsters that were always present. I often think that I hear the voice of my honored father saying unto me still, “whatsoever ye take in hand, persevere until ye accomplish it.” That maxim became with me a principle, which has continued with me from childhood unto this day.

Before proceeding farther, it is necessary for me to say, that my father was not only a poor man, but his occupation was one of the humblest which a peasant could occupy. He filled no higher situation than that of occasional barnman, and hedger and ditcher upon a farm near Thornhill, in Dumfries-shire. Neither was he what some would call a strong-minded man, nor did he know much of what the world calls education, but if he did not know what education was, he knew what the want of it was, and he was resolved that that was a knowledge which his children should never acquire. It was therefore his ambition to make them scholars to the extent of his means. But, when I state, that his income did not exceed six shillings, you will agree with me that those means were not great. But my father’s maxim—*persevere*, carried him over

every difficulty. When my mother had said to him, as a quarter’s wages became due—“Robert, I will never be able to stand their bairns’ schools;—so many o’ them is a perfect ruination to me.”

“Nonsense, Jenny,” he would have said, in his own half-laughing, good-natured way; “the back is always made fit for the burden. Just try another quarter, though we have to be put to our shifts to make it out. I’m no feated but that we will make it out some way or other. We have always done it yet, and what we have done, we can do again. Let us give them all the schooling we can, poor things, and the day will come when they will thank us, or mair than thank us, for all that we have waded upon them. O Jenny woinn I had I been a scholar, as I am not, instead of being the wife of a laboring man the day, ye would have been my wife,—but a leddy.”

A thousand times since it has been a matter of wonder to me, how my parents, out of their meager income, provided food, clothing, and education for their family, which consisted of five sons and four daughters, all of whom could not only read, write, and cast accounts; but though I say it who perhaps ought not to say it, his sons in point of “*scholling*” in higher branches, were the equals, and perhaps more than the equals of the richest farmer’s sons in the neighborhood. And never did a quarter-day arrive, on which any of the nine children of Robert and Janet Gray went before their teacher without his money in their hand, even as the brethren of Joseph the patriarch carried the money in their sacks’ mouth. For it was not with my revered parents, as now-a-days it is with too many, who regard paying a schoolmaster his fees, somewhat in the same light as paying a physician after his patient is dead, or a lawyer when the cause is lost.

Every Saturday night my father, though no scholar himself, caused us to bring home our books and our slates, and in his homely way he examined us—or rather he examined them (the books and the slates) as to the proficiency we had made. Of figures he did know something; grammar, he said, was a new invention, and there, for a time, his examinations were at fault, and he knew not how to judge or to decide. But (I being the oldest) as I grow up, he transferred the examination of my younger brothers, as regarded grammatical proficiency, to me. And well do I remember, that every weekly examination closed with the admonition—“Now bairns persevere.—Ye see how your mother and mo have to fight late and early to keep ye at the school; and it is my greatest ambition to see ye all scholars.—Learning is a grand thing; it is a fortune equal to the best estate in the kingdom—aye even to the duke o’ Buccleugh’s; but O, the want o’ it is a great calamity, as none can tell ye better than your father; therefore bairns, persevere, always strive to be at the head o’ your class, and if I live to be an auld man I shall see some o’ ye leddies and gentlemen.”

Thus the word *persevere* was for ever rung in our ears, and I believe before any of us knew its meaning, we one and all put it in practice. And often when the frost lay white upon the ground, before the sun got up, and even when the ice drew itself together like a piece of lace-work on the shallow pools, at the head of all the classes in our schools, which were just like stepping-stairs, a bare-footed and bare-legged laddie, but with hands and face as clean as the linen on his back, might have been seen as the *dux* of every class; and all those bare-footed and bare-legged laddies were the bairns of Robert Gray.

“Persevere as ye are doing *Roderic*,” my old teacher used to say, “and ye will live to be an