

some particulars, than the worldly-wise and world-corrupted are wont to be, they failed not to set before them—together with certain doctrinal tenets hard to be understood, but which neither teacher nor taught would have deemed other than *sacrilege to dispute reasoning upon*—the more prevailing argument of good and holy living. And let none professing to respect the sacred page deride such simple docility, or pronounce such literally child-like faith to be inconsistent with the production and maturing of the best Christian fruits. We walk fearlessly in the midst of mundane mysteries; and reverence which is the root and nourishment of piety, has seldom been improved by curious searching into the conflicting opinions of men, concerning the deep things of God. It has been well said by the pious Ganganelli, that “man’s fall was at the foot of the tree of knowledge;” and the further plundering of its branches, has but the more discovered to us the barrenness and insufficiency of our native pretensions towards “solving the mystery of our being;” of which the present duties and the future hopes are made sufficiently plain to us in the precepts and promises of the blessed gospel. Happy are they who, through whatever moral and metaphysical clouds, can, like Mary and her parents, discern the wisdom of piety, and the beauty of holiness. In the society I have described, Mary’s early years were nurtured, who was the pride and ornament of her humble home, and the chief solace of its grievances. A daily sufferer from her elder brother’s petulant domineering temper, or the younger’s capricious faultiness, she had the soft answer that turneth away wrath, ever ready to disarm the contender; and, better taught than to reply to the poor ignorant one, according to his folly, by love and gentleness she had won the wayward *natural* to a recognising love for her, and docility to her rule, such as he evinced towards no other human being. His wild, unsettled eye would soften into something like his own kindly humanity, to meet her affectionate smile, when she commended him; and a threat of “gaid lassie’s” displeasure, as he had learned to call her, was commonly a prevailing spell over his most freakish moods. The care of this “helpless, hapless being,” was a heavy burden to hard-working parents; and, to lighten it to them, and prevent an object of terror from becoming an object of dislike in the neighbourhood, Mary employed her ascendancy over him with such assiduous, well-requited watchfulness, and was also so successful in the pacification of her other brother’s churlish humours, it was hardly a conscious sacrifice to her to give up entirely, for her home duties, the society and amusements shared by other young persons around her. And thus, within the shade of those clay-built walls, the flowers of her delicate beauty and modesty grew up little noticed, and uncontaminated; and in that rude association, the virtues of *fidelity to duty, patience, humility, and self-denial*, preparing her to adorn the condition of servitude, for which she was intended, acquired early maturity, by constant and endeared exercise. What character is more honourable than the good and faithful domestic servant—and of that class, styled by a French writer “our natural friends, the victims of our ill humours, the witnesses of our weaknesses, and the sources of our reputation!” Never was there one more deserving to be held in honour than she whose two remarkable, well-authenticated “meetings” with her first and only mistress, I have undertaken to record.

Rosehall, on which the cottage of the Irvings looked down, was, at the date I have mentioned, the only mansion, in the parish of C—, having any pretensions to the character of a gentleman’s seat. In its comparative architectural stateliness, and with its trim front lawn, and picturesque shrubberies, sloping along the windings of the romantic Esk, it had lain before Mary’s eyes from her first dawn of observation, a vision of “glory and of beauty.” In her estimation, scarcely to be surpassed by the notions she had formed of fairy palaces, or of the scriptural magnificence of Babylon the renowned. Its proprietors, whom I will call Mr. and Mrs. Douglas, were persons of good fortune and profuse expenditure, whose habits of self-indulgence had not quite hardened them to the distresses of the poor; and whose urbanity and easy good-nature gave a winning character of benevolence to their facility-granted charities, which would not, perhaps, have stood the

test of the analysing crucible, but which shone out like pure gold in the eyes of the supplicants it relieved. It was, therefore, not surprising, that, in a neighbourhood where necessities abounded, they had the blessing and the good word of a large portion of its rural community; cheaply obtained in any rural locality, by characters of their cast, holding in it the highest place.

On the strength of this reputation, the simple-minded Irvings, who knew them only by their good report, and nothing at all concerning the inside of fine houses, had often wished that their daughter might have the good fortune to get into service at the “great house.” And Mary herself, with her more polished young imagination, having been accustomed to invest the Douglases almost with the attributes of her aunt Kate’s benignant genii, whose power claimed awe, and whose benevolence love, (and with whom she was in fact much better acquainted,) considered such promotion, in connection with the vicinity to her beloved parents, the highest and most desirable to which she could aspire. But, though the idleness and intractability of her brother Saunders more than his manual incapacity to assist his father in his bread-winning trade, made it necessary, as the family advanced in years, that this good girl should leave the home her presence so much solaced, in order to add to its earnings, and lessen its increased expenses, the industry and frugality of the senior Irvings had hitherto rendered their earnings sufficient for their decent support. Their honest pride of independence placed them above soliciting gratuitous aids; and, as the Douglases were not of that importunate class of philanthropists who lift the latch of poverty, and pry into its doings unbidden, it happened that the Irvings, though living so near them, had never, by any chance, obtained more of their notice than the *condescension of a passing salute*; and the good couple were somewhat puzzled how to proceed with their scheme for their daughter’s advancement. Old Kate shook her head, and disapproved of it altogether. She would rather have seen her grandniece placed in some rustic homestead, and “kent way of life,” than with those “gay, grand folk, and their clusters o’ upsetting, fair-fashioned servants, and the maist o’ them Englishers”—for Mrs. Douglas being an Englishwoman, and preferring those of her own country, had failed to find equal favour in the eyes of Scotland-loving Kate.

But her counsel, in this instance, was disregarded by her piously-trusting nephew, who considered his child of many prayers alike sheltered from vital evil, in whatever external circumstances placed. Had he felt and thought otherwise, many would perhaps have had more opportunities of being influenced by some other of his ancient aunt’s notions and tastes; who, he used to say, “had gotten owre my b’s in her bonnet,” (in jocular allusion to her brownies, ballads, and bogles,) “that, in his mind, had nae business to be working aneith a Christian’s cap.”

The introduction, however, of Mary to the favourable notice of Mrs. Douglas, was at length brought about; not by counsel, nor by wisdom, but through the instrumentality of Daft Davie, who happened one morning to be issuing from the cottage just at the moment when that lady and her little daughter Laura drew near to it, emerging from the unusual experiment of an unattended ramble, through the wooded banks of their domain, that stretched upwards to the high-road, where, finding an outlet, they had determined upon returning home by that way. His person and fame (as well as the Boglegite wife’s) were not unknown to them, and their alarm was great, when they saw him coming forth; not, however, with a firebrand in his hand, but with the smoking kail-stick, while Mary, in close pursuit, was endeavouring to wrest from him. On observing the strangers, the idiot instantly let go the subject of contest, and clapping his hands, advanced rapidly towards them, shouting out, “Bonny laddies! bonny laddies!” in his most unearthly tones; which exclamation, however it might have sounded in the ears of the pretty Laura from other lips, had only the effect of increasing her terror, and quickening her retreating footsteps. Breaking away from her mother, who stood irresolute, the little girl fled at her utmost speed, and stopped not till, with new dismay, she found herself in an almost equally dreaded