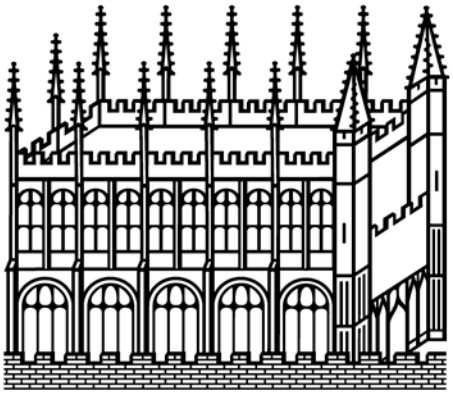


SUSAN

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BY THE AUTHOR OF

"OCEANUS," "BLACK SAM AND HIS MASTER,"

Etc., Etc.

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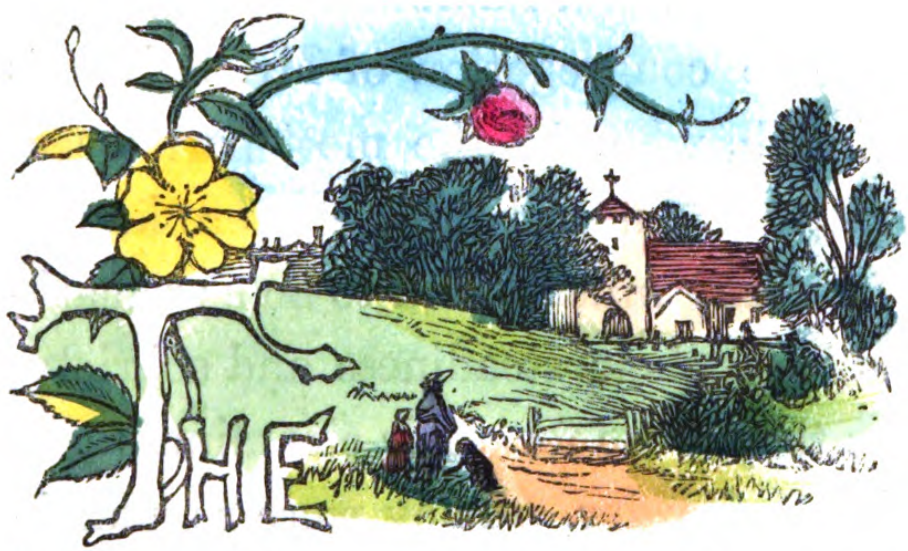


THE Sun rose in majestic beauty over the pleasant village, and gilded with its glowing beams the roofs of the various little cottages, which, surrounded by their picturesque hedges and pretty gardens, so gaily adorned with flowers and carefully and economically cultivated, to supply their owners with fruits, herbs, and substantial vegetables, presented a delightful

picture of neatness and comfort, in every respect suitable for the abodes of the peaceful inhabitants.

The congregation of Mr. Selwyn's church, who, for the most part, occupied these neat dwellings, were known for many miles round to be as remarkable for their steadiness and sobriety, as they were for their cleanliness and love of order. They were regular in their attendance at church; angry words were never heard amongst them; the children were always tidy, civil to strangers, and eager to learn. The voice of scandal or detraction was never encouraged in their little community; for all knew that they had many failings of their own to bewail, and they made due allowance for the failings of others; and, although they

were ignorant of much book learning, yet, having a "knowledge of God," they added to their "godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity;" thus endeavouring "every one to please his neighbour for good to edification," according to the "light that was in him," missing no opportunity of assisting each other by the "word in season"—the Christian sympathy so precious among the poor, and the many daily sacrifices of time and substance when needed for the solace of the sick or the nursing of the young and infirm.

But although these pretty cottages were, generally speaking, the abodes of happiness and industry, yet, alas! there was one little blot on the fair picture—there was one home where

there was *no peace;* one family where there was *no love;* one house where there was NO GOD! and, as our story principally relates to that family, it is necessary to know who and what they were.

John Murray was a navigator, or labourer on a railway. His wife was a laundress, and his little daughter Susan was expected to do anything and everything which either father or mother might require to be done, without any trouble being taken to teach her, or any kind words to encourage her in the many hard tasks she had to perform, and the many severe trials of temper to which she was daily, nay hourly, subjected. They were not natives of the village: John Murray's work had brought him

there; but, as they could show very fair testimonials of character for sobriety, honesty, and industry, the wife soon procured sufficient employment from some few respectable families in the neighbourhood, which, added to John's earnings, afforded abundant means for them to live comfortably and be clothed tidily.

But without godliness there is no contentment. They were not contented, consequently they were not happy. They never looked beyond the present life. They toiled incessantly, spending their money without thought or consideration. One day was the same to them as another; no rest—no quiet—no enjoyment. They regarded with scorn all the *churchgoers;* ridiculing them on every occa-

sion as Methodists and psalm-singers, and wondered "how they could afford to waste so much time in dressing up and marching off to church two or three times every Sunday, when they might be earning an honest penny at home." Such being the parents' way of life, it is not to be wondered at that when Susan was eight years of age she knew nothing of religion, but as a thing to be laughed at; could not say a prayer, nor even point out a single letter in the alphabet, although her mother could both read and write.

The clergyman of the village had offered to take Susan into his little school, but Mrs. Murray always replied that they were very poor people; that she could not spare her, for Susan must be brought up to work like her-

self, instead of going to school, indeed! to be perked up on a bench all day with a book in her hand, like a fine lady.

Mr. Selwyn made several attempts to induce Mrs. Murray to send the child to school; and at length, finding he could not prevail, he ceased his solicitations, not, however, despairing of success, for he was far too earnest in his desire to rescue this little girl from the curse of ignorance to be disheartened by a few failures; but he thought it expedient to try another plan, and every Saturday found the patient minister in the mean, untidy room of John Murray's cottage, reasoning with the loud, ignorant laundress, and meekly replying to the many pert questions which every in-

stant burst from her lips as she thumped her iron down on the board, or vigorously rubbed it over the linen.

John Murray was never at home on these occasions, but little Susan was always there, and she every day became more fond of the good parson; he was so kind and gentle, so different to her parents, who were always cross and snappish, scolding her for the most trifling fault, and quarrelling with each other continually.

One day when Mr. Selwyn left the cottage, after a brief, but, on Mrs. Murray's side, a very angry conversation concerning the education of her child, Susan stole softly out while her mother was busy cleaning an iron, and, following Mr. Selwyn until quite out of sight of the cottage door, she stepped

up to his side, and, dropping a curtsey, while her little face flushed with haste and anxiety, she said—

"Sir, please if I could come *one* day in the week without mother's knowing it, would you please teach me to read?"

Mr. Selwyn was much surprised at this appeal, and for a moment remained silent, pondering in his mind what best to do, and how most prudently to gratify the poor child's desire to gain that knowledge which her unprincipled parents seemed determined to withhold from her. Susan followed him very patiently, looking eagerly in his face for the reply to her question, and wondering if she had made her kind friend angry by her importunity, or if it was a very wrong

request to make, or what else it could be that kept him silent; but her suspense ended when he quietly said—

"So you really wish to learn, my little girl; well, I will think about the matter, and let you know when I come next Saturday."

"Oh! but please sir, mother will hear it then, and she won't let me go to school, I'm sure, if she knows, for she has often got in a passion about it, and so has father too;" and poor Susan's eyes filled with tears as she thought all chance of learning was at an end if her mother was to be told of her wish, and of her having taken upon herself to ask the parson: she might even get a whipping for daring to think of such a thing; and, as this thought rushed into her head, she

clasped her hands, and looked beseechingly at Mr. Selwyn, while she said—

"Please don't tell mother, sir; she will be so angry, after all she has said about it; and it'll be no use, she'll never let me go to school; I am sure she won't, so please don't tell her, and I'll try to do without the learning."

"Oh! we will manage all that," replied Mr. Selwyn; "there, run home now, and leave off crying; mind your work, and *I'll* see what can be done about this book business." He patted Susan kindly on the head, wished her goodbye, and turned again towards the rectory.

Susan did run home, and then ran to the railway with her father's dinner tied up in a basin and cloth. No word

of thanks rewarded the child; she loitered about until the basin was emptied of its contents, when, her father calling her, she packed up the things, and, returning home, sat down at the door of the cottage to eat her own meal. It was only potatoes, with a very small piece of fat pork; but Susan had never tasted luxuries, and, having a good appetite, always enjoyed her frugal meals, even when they consisted of only potatoes, or oatmeal porridge and salt. This day she was thinking so much of the school, and how happy she would be if she could learn to read, that she took a longer time than usual to empty her plate, and her mother, who had no notion of her child wasting her time, called to her before she had well

finished, to carry home a basket of linen.

In another minute Susan was again trudging along the road with a basket on her head, and a very badly written bill in her hand.

Susan worked very hard all day, although she was only eight years of age, and she was of great use to her mother. It is astonishing what a number of things a little girl of eight *can* do, if she has made up her mind to be handy; but it is not astonishing how much happier she will feel while thus employed, than if she were idling in the lanes and fields, or romping with rude, disorderly children. Luckily for Susan, there were no little companions to be found loitering about in the roads she had to pass through, for

all the village children were at school, so she had no temptation to stray from her duty; therefore we must not praise her too much, as she was but a weak, ignorant little girl, and, under different circumstances, might not have been so steady; as it was, she worked willingly and cheerfully, finding pleasure in her daily walks, and occasional visits to the houses of her mother's employers.

Her first business in the morning was to go into the lanes and copses collecting sticks, and when the weather was dry, she would take home a good bundle for her mother's fire; then she had three trips every day to the railway with her father's breakfast, dinner, and tea, besides all errands to run in the village; for it was

seldom her mother could think of all her marketing at once, so that Susan had a great many journeys when one might have served the purpose; sometimes an ounce of tea was wanted, or a quarter of a pound of butter, then, all on a sudden, she must run for a penny candle, as it was getting dark, and there was not a bit in the house, and there was ironing to finish which would take a couple of hours at least to do, so Susan was continually on the trot, saving her mother's time considerably, and sometimes making her good-tempered, and even kind, although that did not often happen, for, not being influenced by religion, Mrs. Murray was selfish and cross-tempered, besides which, she quarrelled so constantly with her husband, who

would exercise some authority over her, and be, as he expressed it, "master in his own house," that, compelled to submission while he was at home, she comforted herself by tyrannizing over Susan in his absence, who, poor child! frequently got many hard words, and harder blows, when she did not really deserve them; for, despite the little care taken of her, the bad training and evil example daily before her in the conduct of both parents, our little girl possessing a good disposition, was not only obedient to her father and mother, but was very careful in her work, and very quick and clever in her various occupations. Susan longed for Saturday to come, she was so anxious to hear what Mr. Selwyn would say concerning the school,

and how he would contrive to coax her mother into giving her consent, so she was particularly brisk that morning, washed up the breakfast things, peeled the potatoes, set the cottage in order, and, bustling about with frock tucked up, she accomplished more than her usual share of the household work, and was ready soon after dinner to comb her hair neatly, put her clean pinafore on, and, with her sewing in her hand, take her stool to the cottage door.

But she did not make much progress with her work, as her eyes were continually raised to see if Mr. Selwyn turned into the lane.

At last she could actually see some person, but he was too far off to distinguish, and it might be only a la-

bouring man returning to his work, so she plied her needle vigorously, and tried to wait patiently for his approach.

As he drew nearer, she could plainly see the neat dress, well-brushed hat, and gold-headed stick of the rector. It was Mr. Selwyn; and now Susan became very fidgetty: first she dropped her thimble; in finding that she upset her stool; then her thread rolled out of her lap, and the cat unravelled it, causing her a deal of trouble.

At length, her impatience exceeding her prudence, she jumped from her seat, and was just running to the garden gate, when her mother, observing her restlessness, came sharply after her, and, placing her again on her stool with no gentle hand, exclaimed—

"What ails the child? Can't you sit still, you tiresome little thing, you, and do your work? I'll be bound I'll quiet you presently with a whipping."

Susan timidly informed her mother that the rector was coming; but this made matters still worse, and Mrs. Murray looked very ill-tempered indeed, as she said—

"I wish to goodness Mr. Selwyn wouldn't come here hindering me in my work, with his book-learning and bible texts; they are all very well for fine folks who have nothing else to do, but poor people would not get very fat, I'm thinking, if they spent all their time in reading and going to church; for my part, I don't see the good of it, and he may talk till doomsday before *I* turn Methodist."

The last word caught the ear of Mr. Selwyn as he entered the cottage, but he made no remark; he merely said "Good morning," and then conversed on a variety of indifferent matters until the angry woman was a degree cooler in her temper, when he introduced the immediate object of his visit by saying—

"Mrs. Murray, do you think you could spare me Susan for an hour every morning?"

"If you mean for the school, sir, I've told you often before that I've no notion of settin' my girl up, and making her cleverer than myself, and I don't mean to send her to school to have her head filled with fine notions, while I'm slaving at home to provide her with victuals and drink: no, sir!

and I must say I think you can know very little of the hardships of the poor when you come to ask such a thing, as if *our* time was worth nothing, indeed."

Mrs. Murray was very indignant.

"It is not to the school, my good woman. I want you to let me have your daughter's services for one hour every morning during the week, for which, as 'every labourer is worthy of his hire,' I will agree to give her a shilling on the Saturday. Will you allow her to come to me on these terms?"

Mrs. Murray was mollified.

"Oh, yes! and thank you kindly too, sir," and she turned towards his reverence and dropped a very respectful courtsey; "every little is a help

to us poor folk; and although I say it, (which, being her mother, p'raps I I oughtn't to do,) yet I'm sure you'll find our Susan a quick, handy girl, and willing enough, I'll be bound, and I'm sure I hope she'll please your reverence and the ladies."

"Well, then, as I see you are busy I will not detain you any longer, but I shall expect you will send Susan neat and clean to me every morning at nine o'clock, and she shall bring the shilling to you every Saturday."

He wished them "good morning," and quitted the cottage.

Mrs. Murray was perfectly amiable. But who can tell of Susan's joy! How her heart bounded at the delightful prospect, for she felt sure that now she should learn to read. She could not

refrain from running after Mr. Selwyn, and, with eyes filled with grateful tears, pouring out her full heart in thanks for his great kindness.

"Mr. Selwyn is a good gentleman, isn't he, Susan?" said Mrs. Murray, when the child returned. "I always said so to your father, but he never agreed with me, though many's the time I've argued about it. He says he's a stuck-up parson, and a meddling methodist: but people are not always so bad as they're painted; and may be father'll think so too, now that you are to go to the parsonage among the ladies, and earn money enough to buy your own clothes. Let me see: a shilling a week is a good bit of money for such a child; I wonder what you can do that'll be worth a shilling. How-

ever, that's their business; the money will dress you bravely, that's a fact; you shall have a silk bonnet and side-laced boots to wear on a Sunday, and then you'll be as smart as those proud minxes the Simmonses there, at the chandler's shop; they turn their noses up at you now, but we shall see what they will do by and by, when you dress as well as the best of them, and carry your head as high.

"I shouldn't wonder if it puts your father in a good temper when he comes home to-night, and we shall have peace and quietness for a day or two. Ah, well; some people are more lucky than other people, though I never thought of your getting work and wages at the parson's house, and none of our seeking neither. But bless me,

look at the fire, it's all but out; the kettle'll never boil at that rate. Here, child, get some sticks, and then get your bonnet on: you can blow the fire while I cut the bread and butter; but mind, don't you say a word to your father about our piece of luck while he's getting his tea. I know how your tongue runs sometimes; so now just take care and say nothing about it."

"No, mother;" and away started Susan, singing as merrily, though possibly not quite so harmoniously, as a lark. She could not steady herself by a quiet walk, but went jumping and skipping from one side of the road to the other; and as she went, her little head was busy enough building *such* castles in the air, the foundations of which were based on her skill in read-

ing and her weekly earnings, as would astonish the most sanguine, but which to her seemed not only practicable but positively the most moderate and reasonable ideas that could be entertained on so grand a subject.

Sunday seemed the longest day Susan had ever remembered, although, as Mrs. Murray was in high spirits about the parson's kindness, she not only allowed Susan to go twice to church, but actually unwrapped her own best bonnet and shawl, which had not seen the light for many a day, and accompanied her to the morning service. The neighbours looked astonished when Mrs. Murray entered the sacred building, as several years had passed since she had made even sufficient difference between the Sabbath

and working days to abstain from her regular daily labour, or to array herself in more decent apparel; and the quiet church-goers exchanged looks when the service was over, and, greeting her kindly, they heartily congratulated her on her appearance amongst them.

Mrs. Murray returned home pleased and gratified, determining to go to church every Sunday, and let the neighbours see that she was as good as they were, although she did not profess to be a *psalm-singer*, and that she could dress as well, although she did not call upon God night and morning as they did. Poor woman! her mind was filled with vanity, and her heart lifted up, instead of being softened by the kindness of her poor friends.

Now, Susan, although she was better dressed than usual—for she had on a white tippet, which came down below her waist and covered her arms, and her mother had tied a strip of pretty coloured silk round her little straw hat, which both agreed was a great improvement—still, her whole thoughts were not given to her dress, and what other folks would think of her appearance; we are glad to say *she* thought a great deal more of her good fortune in being employed by Mr. Selwyn and his daughters, and she said over and over to herself, as she sat in church, "Oh! how I will try to please them all; I will work so hard, and then they will teach me lots of things, and I sha'n't tell mother till I know *ever* so much, when she will

wonder so. Oh! I am so glad, for I shall be able to know all parson says at church when I can read myself; now I don't know anything, and it seems so difficult, though mother says it ai'nt."

Notwithstanding Mrs. Murray had been to church, and hearing the Divine word of God proclaiming "Peace on earth, goodwill toward men," yet the Sunday dinner was no quieter than usual.

"You might have looked to the dinner, John," she exclaimed, as she raised the lid of the saucepan, where the meat had boiled nearly dry, and the vegetables were burning at the bottom; "but it's just like you: I ought to have known that; you never do anything when you're at home, and

if the dinner *had* been all spoilt, *you* wouldn't have cared, not you. I am sure there ai'nt another woman in the village, nor in all Hampshire neither, that is plagued with such a 'don't care,' ill-tempered, good-for-nothing husband as I am. Why don't you go to church, like other decent people? Other *navvies* go to church and chapel, to learn something from the parson. If you only got catechism, it would be better a deal than sitting here all the morning, doing nothing but smoking and drinking and dozing."

There was some slight excuse for Mrs. Murray, who, feeling that she had been aiming at a more proper mode of life, or, as she termed it, "seeking after godliness," was very indignant that she should suffer in the

matter of a dinner for the performance of her duty; and as John did not find himself in a mood to discuss the point just then, he sat quietly while she continued to talk and scold, until the food was on the table, when, securely seated before the steaming dish, he soon found his tongue and gave her word for word, so that, talking and eating, they battled it out, to the great discomfort of poor Susan, who was glad enough to escape the contention by carrying off the bowl containing the plates and dishes to the outside of the cottage, preparatory to washing them.

She sat down in the warm sun, and ten minutes sufficed to remove all appearance of the late riotous repast. When carrying the clean crockery

into the kitchen, to arrange on the shelves, she found her father had grumbled himself to sleep, and her mother, having no one to wrangle with, was bustling about as on other days.

Susan, not being wanted, put on her hat and strolled from the house.

The sun was bright and warm, and the long winding lane looked very inviting, studded with its numerous little dwellings, and hedged on either side with hawthorn and wild rose bushes; while here and there a tall elm, or wide-spreading beech tree, rose high above those rustic homes, and made the dancing beams of the glorious sun cut the pathway into various irregular but picturesque lines of mingled light and shade. Then

the singing of the full-throated birds which hopped from tree to tree, merrily chanting forth their gratitude to their Maker for the life, and light, and warmth they then enjoyed with such intensity. These also made glad the heart of this little child, while the lowing of the distant herds, the faint tinkling of the sheep-bell, and other indistinct but peaceful sounds, fell on Susan's ear as she stepped along the chequered path, prompting her, young as she was, to compare her condition with that of the happy creatures, the flocks and herds, the birds and butterflies, even the brisk, jolly little ants which ran so nimbly across her feet, and wondering if they ever felt what she so often experienced—a *weight of woe* for one so young, a

yearning after peace, and love, and sympathy.

Thus comparing, she thought of Mr. Selwyn, of the quiet church, and of the morrow, with all its anticipated happiness, and a sweet gleam of hope shot across her young soul at the prospect of attaining the summit of her desires. For a few moments she was as intensely happy as the birds seemed to be, and could sympathise with the busy little ants, whose cheerful activity is a lesson to all human creatures.

The shrill voice of her mother destroyed this pleasing dream, and she hastened back to do her bidding.

What was Susan's astonishment when her mother desired her to put on her tippet, that she might be ready to start for the afternoon service directly

the bells began! You may guess that she was not long getting ready, and at the very first sound of the "church-going bell," she sallied forth, and mingled with the happy train of children who, all dressed in their best garments, with their books carefully wrapped in their pocket-handkerchiefs, so peacefully trod the path which led to the village church.

But Sunday, with its peace, its holy rest, its pious teachings, passed away, and the anxiously expected morn arrived when Susan was to go to the parsonage.

She arose with the sun, collected fuel for her mother, swept the kitchen, carried her father's breakfast, then, washing her face until it shone with the effects of soap and rubbing, she

put on her dark cotton frock and coarse every-day bonnet, and having received a chapter of directions from her mother concerning her behaviour before the ladies, she went gaily on her way to her "place."

So did the soul of this little human creature yearn for the knowledge of better things, and so does the soul of every child crave for food; and if it be not supplied with *proper* food—food calculated to inspire it with good and great thoughts of God and love, charity and forbearance, patience and perseverance, it will most assuredly seek for sustenance in the husks of the world, in the vices of the age. It will be educated by *circumstances*, and in all probability become a living monument of disgrace to itself, its

parents, its generation, and its country! What material food is to the body, religion and education are to the soul; and as the soul is ever on the alert doing either good or evil, it is not only kind and charitable, but it is a duty which we owe to our fellow creatures to aid, according to our ability, in the supply of the requisites for that education which the poor and ignorant so much need, and which will tend so largely to their future happiness, while it is also the means of supplying their present necessities, and increasing their comfort and content.

Susan's heart bounded for joy when she beheld the "modest mansion" in the distance, with its neat porch peeping forth so invitingly from amidst a

profusion of climbing plants and blossoming shrubs. She ran until she was quite out of breath, then stopping for a moment to arrange her hair and bonnet, to dust her shoes, and smooth the puckers out of her pinafore, she raised her hand, and pulled the bell very gently.

"If you please I am Susan Murray," she replied, on the servant's inquiry respecting her business; "and Mr. Selwyn said I was to come every morning at nine o'clock."

"Very well, my dear," said the civil servant, "sit down here while I run and tell the master that you are come." So saying, she left Susan to look about her in the hall.

In a few minutes she was ushered into Mr. Selwyn's library, when he

shook hands with her kindly, and said he was glad to see her so punctual (the clock was just striking nine); he rose from his chair, and bidding her follow him, led her up a long staircase into a neat little room, where two young ladies were seated at work.

"These ladies will be your future mistresses, Susan, and if you are a good girl, and try to do well, they will teach you to read and write, and to do many other useful things."

Susan dropped a curtsey, and said "she *would* try to please the ladies;" so Miss Selwyn rang the bell, and when the servant came, she asked her to show Susan where to place her bonnet, and then to instruct her in the work she would be required to do

every morning before she entered their sitting-room to read and sew.

So Susan followed the servant Fanny, hung her bonnet up as she was directed, and then, together, they went into the garden. Such a garden as Susan never could have imagined; so large and magnificent, so neat and beautiful. They went along several walks until they came to an arbour, and if Susan felt surprised at the beauty of the garden, she was more so with the appearance of this delightful retreat, which the fatherly kindness of Mr. Selwyn had so tastefully arranged for the pleasure and amusement of his dear daughters.

Mr. Selwyn was a widower, and his daughters, Agnes and Minnie, had been for several years past joint mistresses

of his household, and mutual partakers of his joys and sorrows. They were young in years, for Agnes, the elder, was but eighteen, while Minnie was two years her junior, but they were experienced beyond their age in the afflictions of the world. They had lost several brothers, a sister, and a dear mother, all within a very short space of time. They had been severely tried in the furnace of affliction, and now, in the flower of their youth, shone forth lovely gems, brightening daily to adorn the diadem of their heavenly Father. Yet they were not melancholy girls, such as are often represented, with large dark eyes constantly suffused with tears; nor were they pharisaical in their devotion, continually on their knees, or poring

over their bibles, to the exclusion of all other books, nor did they speak like text-books, nor sing only psalms, nor think it sinful to laugh. No, their religion was *of God*, and not the religion of the world; it was of the heart, and not merely the *form* of godliness. RELIGION, real, true religion, does not *destroy* our happiness, nor make us gloomy and sad; on the contrary, it is the only sure road to *real enjoyment*, and no people in the world, no matter how healthy, wealthy, or admired they may be, are so thoroughly happy, so continually cheerful, and so truly sensible of the many blessings bestowed by our bountiful Creator as the sincerely religious people.

Such religion sustained Mr. Selwyn, and such religion animated his

daughters, and prompted them to deeds of love and kindness, which endeared them to the villagers, and gained the esteem of the whole neighbourhood. They were like the good pastor immortalised by the poet Goldsmith—

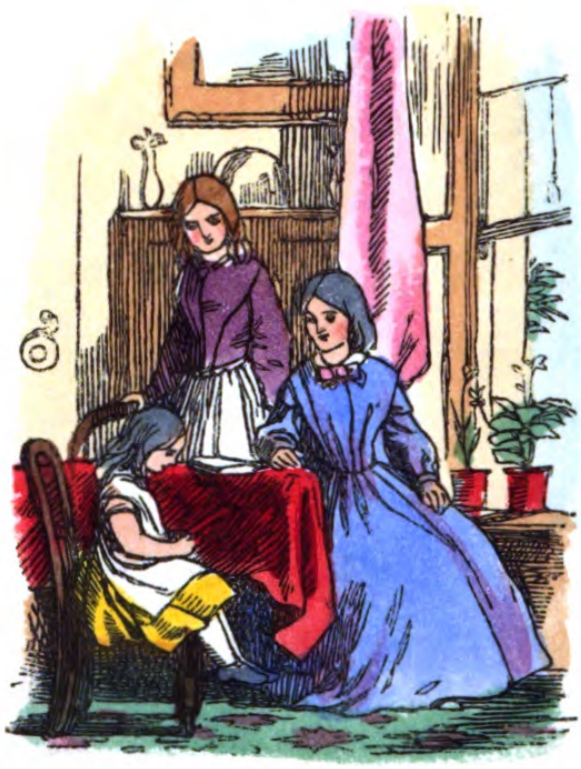
They watched and wept; they prayed and felt for all.
And as a bird each fond endearment tries,
To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,
They tried each art, reproved each dull delay,
Allur'd to brighter worlds, and led the way.

And these ladies were to be Susan's teachers.

We must now return to the bower, where we left our little friend in wonder and admiration—and indeed she had sufficient cause for wonder and admiration. This bower was adorned with the choicest plants, most beauti-

fully and delicately arranged, which filled the air with their delicious fragrance, and charmed the eye with their variety and harmony of colour, while, suspended from the roof and around the sides, hung spacious and handsome cages. In these cages, so spacious as to make their inmates feel almost at liberty, were canaries, bullfinches, goldfinches, and linnets, which sang so exquisitely as they fluttered to and fro in their sunny bower, that they gladdened the heart of this poor neglected child, while she prayed and elevated her thoughts to the good God, who made such pretty creatures, and such a pretty world for them to live in.

Susan received her instructions from the good-natured Fanny; they were to keep these pretty choristers in com-



fort and cleanliness, to trim and water the plants, and to make bright, by daily rubbing, the quaint old tables and seats which ornamented this sweet little aviary.

This all done, she was to go to the young ladies' room to read.

The first morning, of course, Fanny did all the work, while Susan looked on, but she paid so much attention, that she never required any further instructions, but accomplished her work every morning with great comfort and delight, leaving plenty of time for her lessons and needle. In the winter the birds and plants were removed within doors, where she then tended them, and performed many other useful services for Agnes and Minnie Selwyn, while they took great interest in the

progress she made, and great pains to teach her not only to read and write and cipher, but occasionally gave her lessons in needlework, teaching her to sew neatly, to mark, and to knit. Before she had been there nine months, she was so much improved in her manners and behaviour that her mother unconsciously treated her with more gentleness, and began by little and little to evince a desire to know what Susan could have been learning at the parsonage.

This rather alarmed the poor child, as she feared that her mother would take her away from her kind young mistresses if once she knew that she was learning to read, and for a long time she hesitated to inform her of the lessons she learnt, merely telling her

about the birds and flowers, and showing her some samples of her needlework and knitting. However, at last, finding she could actually read very well, and feeling safe on that subject, she thought she would venture to explain it all to her mother the next time she asked, "Well, Susan, and what have you been doing this morning?"

So Susan told how that ever since she first went to the parsonage, she had spent half the hour in learning to read and write; and she trembled while she told her innocent tale, quite expecting a violent burst of passion from her mother. But there was no outbreak of wrath, as Susan had tremblingly anticipated, Mrs. Murray merely said—

"And what can you read?"

"Oh! mother, Miss Agnes gave me a little book last week," cried Susan; "it is about some poor girls the rector knew, and he wrote the book; if you will let me, I will read it to you."

"Very well, child, then, carry your father's tea, and when you come back we will talk about the reading."

You may be sure Susan was not long absent, and the tea-things washed, and placed in the cupboard, the little book was produced. Mrs. Murray admired the binding, and the pretty picture, where a gentleman was riding full speed through the country on a very stormy night, and giving it back to Susan, she took her sewing, poked the fire together, and prepared to listen.

And Susan, feeling happier than she had ever felt in her life, seated herself on her little stool, and opened the book.

And this was the story she read to her mother:—

POOR LUCY'S CHILDREN.

A sudden and unexpected storm swept the heavens, and gave an appearance of gloom to the surrounding landscape, as Dr. Sanford mounted his horse to visit one of his most interesting patients: not interesting according to the general acceptation of the word, for Lucy Reynolds was a very poor widow, but interesting from the many circumstances which had brought her so entirely under the Doctor's care, that she had chiefly de-

pended on his bounty for many months past, to provide the necessaries of life for herself and babes, and now, when she was laid on a bed of suffering, with small hope of her ultimate recovery, the good Doctor felt she had still a greater claim on his bounty and kindly sympathies, and he would not allow any severity of weather to prevent his customary visit to this his most interesting patient.

The rain fell in torrents; the wind drifted the heavy drops into his face, compelling him to bow his head, as he urged his horse forward through the darkness; but he heeded it not, good, unselfish man! he was intent on his duty, and he made his duty his pleasure, never knowing happiness in the neglect of it; he was now ex-

tremely anxious concerning poor Lucy, for he had seen a marked change in her fair young face when he visited her in the early part of the day, and he feared that his skill could no longer avail to spare the young life which had been hovering so long over the grave of her husband.

Dr. Sandford had employed a young woman, for whom he had a great respect, a Mrs. Bell, to nurse Lucy Reynolds, and look to the children; and as he passed into the cottage, Mrs. Bell came forward to greet him. She told him, as usual, all that had occurred during the day, and watched his countenance while he listened. She read there but little consolation, and turned away to hide her tears, (for the gentleness and patience

of the poor invalid had greatly endeared her to the loving heart of good Mrs. Bell,) while the Doctor entered the room, and approached the bed.

He was too late; already the dew of death had cast its pallid hue over the wasted features; her eyes were open, but their sense was closed for ever. She could not see her kind friend; she heard his low, soft voice, and a slight pressure of his hand told more than speech in that hour of agony; he spoke soothing words of hope and comfort to the dying girl, and when she could no longer hear them, he turned to the weeping nurse—

"Human skill can avail no longer; with God we must leave her, for in

His hands are the issues of life and death."

And he turned to leave the room; but a sudden exclamation from Mrs. Bell caused him to rush again to the bedside. Lucy had raised herself, and with wild, eager looks, and poor, trembling hands, was striving to reach her departing friend. He caught her in his arms, laid her tenderly on her pillow, and while she strove with panting breath to articulate, he anticipated what she wished to say, and assured her that her children should be well provided for. A calm, sweet look of resignation and happiness animated her face for a moment; then the lids drooped; the long lashes lay fluttering on the pale cheek; one long, convulsive, shuddering sigh, and the pure

spirit of Lucy Reynolds had winged its way to that world where there is no sorrow, where all tears would be wiped from her eyes.

Dr. Sanford walked quietly from the cottage, and passed into the open air. The storm had ceased; it was night, but it was not dark, for now the moonlight was streaming through the little casement in silvery radiance, illuminating the humble couch of his late patient, while the stars shone brightly in the clear heavens, and lighted the benevolent physician to his home. A warm welcome from his own loved family awaited him, and anxious inquiries were on every lip as he seated himself in the midst of the circle.

"Poor Lucy is at rest, my dear," he

said, addressing his wife; "and, but that I know she is released from a world of care and bitter suffering, to enter one of joy and peace, I should grieve much for the death of one so young, so fair, and so promising; for who, of all my patients, was ever so meek in adversity? who was ever so gentle and uncomplaining under losses, pains, and privations? and who so disinterested, so utterly unselfish in all her vicissitudes as this poor afflicted young widow?"

"But what will become of the children?" inquired Mrs. Sanford; "those helpless infants have no relations to look to, and they are left without any prospect of support except from charity.'

"Then, my dear, they must be

supported by charity until they are old enough to earn their own living, and I know you will aid me in the furtherance of my plans for the comfort of these poor orphans."

Willingly Mrs. Sanford went hand in hand with her good husband, whose benevolence ceased not with the life of his heart-broken patient; and when the last rites were performed, they made arrangements for Mrs. Bell to take one, and Mrs. Smith, another young woman in the village, who bore a very good character for management, was to have the other.

Dr. Sandford procured an allowance from the parish, to which he added a small sum weekly, and so made sufficient for their comfortable maintenance.

Now, Lucy and Mary were very young when their mother died; and in childhood tears are forgotten as soon as shed.

The sorrows of early youth make no *lasting* impression, although, at the time of their occurrence, they are in effect as difficult to bear as the apparently overwhelming trials of our maturer years, which, but for the gracious support of an ever watchful Providence, would crush our spirits to the dust. He hath promised, and He will fulfil His promise, that "as our days are, so shall our strength be."

Lucy and Mary soon forgot their troubles, and were as light-hearted as most children are in the days of their infancy, when they have no thoughts beyond the present moment. They

often saw each other, for Mrs. Bell and Mrs. Smith lived in adjoining cottages, and the children played together in the lane the greater part of every day, with the children of their respective nurses. But as they grew older affairs altered; Mrs. Smith had five children, and Lucy, being a year older than any of them, Mrs. Smith made her work very hard, nursing and cleaning, and running of errands; she certainly taught her many useful things in household work, and taught her also to sew and hem, that she might help her to mend the other children's clothes; but so continually busy was poor Lucy, that she was a perfect drudge, clothed in the commonest apparel, garments that were considered too shabby for Mrs. Smith's little girl, and never fit

to be seen on account of the dirty work by which she was invariably occupied.

Mary's case was very different; for although Mrs. Bell also had a family of children, still, as she was a God-fearing woman, she regarded it in the light of a grievous sin to defraud the poor orphan by appropriating her little pittance to the use of her own children, as Mrs. Smith did when she sent her three daughters to church every Sunday, smartly arrayed with the produce of the money which ought to have been spent upon Lucy; while poor Lucy was compelled to remain at home, hard at work, cooking and cleaning, and never possessed a decent frock to tidy herself with on the Sabbath.

Mrs. Bell knew all this; and, much

as she pitied Lucy, she could not improve her condition, for the good Doctor had left the neighbourhood; and although he continued to allow the children even more money than heretofore, yet he was unable to look after their welfare personally, and obliged to trust to the consciences of their nurses. And Mrs. Bell determined to be just towards Mary. All the money she received for the child's use was strictly applied to the purchase of such things as were necessary; and, as she was an industrious little girl, and very handy, Mrs. Bell resolved not only to feed and clothe her as well as she did her own children, but also that she should be taught with them, to the end that she might grow up to be useful to herself and others.

Accordingly, every morning saw Mary and two of Mrs. Bell's little girls walking, neat and clean, to the village school, which was conducted by an able and conscientious woman; and every evening Mrs. Bell would herself catechise them upon what they had been learning during the day at school.

Mrs. Bell had been blessed with good parents, who estimated EDUCATION at its right value, and spent all their little savings to have their child instructed; and right well had that money been spent, for their daughter became an excellent woman in every relation of life, and was beloved by all her friends and neighbours. They respected her for her superior knowledge, and loved her for her exemplary kindness.

Thus several years passed on. Mary, when she reached her twelfth birth-day, was not only able to read and write correctly, but had progressed so far beyond many of the girls at school, that the mistress asked Mrs. Bell's permission to retain her for a teacher, instead of a pupil, and offered to give her a new frock every half year, as payment for her services. To this Mrs. Bell gladly assented, and Mary, now a steady, well-behaved girl, while giving instruction to others, herself rapidly improved.

Thus, teaching and learning, Mary grew to be a young woman, and then it was that Mrs. Bell reaped the reward of her care and kindness to the helpless orphan; for, being seized with a dreadful illness, which for a

long time deprived her of the use of her limbs, Mary kept the house in order, taught the children, made their clothes, and did everything so wisely and so well, that Mrs. Bell's husband said "she was a real blessing to them, for she could turn her hand to anything."

When Mrs. Bell was getting better, Mary set up a little school herself, as the good dame who had instructed her had more pupils than she could accommodate. By her kind recommendation Mary had so many children placed under her tuition, that she was soon enabled to pay not only for her board and lodging independent of the parish, but also to assist in clothing Mrs. Bell's younger girls; for Mrs. Bell had eight children, and the

youngest was a mere baby when Mary was grown up, and many a remnant of pretty print, many a pair of shoes and socks, and even now and then a neat little bonnet or hat, testified to the sense of gratitude Mary had of the tender care of her good nurse.

Mary was just twenty years of age when she married a steady young man with whom she had long been acquainted, and she left the roof of good Mrs. Bell with tender regret, for her youth had been passed there in great comfort and happiness. But she left blessed with the sincere good wishes of the whole family, and laden with little testimonials of affection from every individual. Mrs. Bell gave her a beautiful bible, and had herself worked a cushion for it to rest upon.

Mr. Bell presented her with an eight-day clock; and the younger members gave her various knick-knacks, either useful or ornamental, for her new home, and so she went on her way to cheer and comfort the husband of her choice; and, leaving her so well provided for, we must now turn to the other side of the picture, and see what had become of Lucy.

As Mrs. Smith commenced, so she went on; she did not think it necessary to spend the money she received from the parish upon Lucy; she said "she had no thought of bringing the girl up with fine notions; she ought to be thankful if she got victuals and drink without stinting, and not expect to have smart clothes and book learning, which were only intended for her

betters. Very fine it is of Mrs. Bell (foolish woman!) dressing up Mary and sending her to school every day with her own children, while *she*, forsooth, has to work morning and night to keep things in order. No, no!" said Mrs. Smith, with a significant shake of the head, "no, no! you won't catch *me* doing that sort of thing; I'm not such a fool, I know better than to put Lucy over my own children by sending her to school, indeed, and letting her learn to do what I can't do myself. *I* never had any education but housework, and *I* have done very well without it, for there ain't many better managers than me in the place, that I know; so she must do without education, for she gets none of that while she is with me, I'll warrant."

Mrs. Bell often talked in a kind, neighbourly way to Mrs. Smith about Lucy, and used to say—

"I fear you are wrong, Mrs. Smith, to keep the poor child as you do; she is not taught to read, or to be polite in her behaviour, nor even clean in her person, and the money you have for her is quite enough to clothe her and teach her too; I find it so with Mary, and she's ten times more use to me now, since she has been getting on so well with her schooling. I know myself that people who have an education of the right sort are a deal happier than those who set their hearts against learning. I am sure it is the greatest comfort in life to me and my husband to hear the children reading the beautiful books they bring from

the village library, and I am never so happy as when we are all sitting round our little fire, Joe quietly smoking his pipe, Mary Reynolds reading, and all the rest of us sewing, knitting, or working, one way and another. Joe says he never wishes to be any happier, for his home is all that a man can desire; and to see how he enjoys his pipe, and how he takes in all the information, it would do your heart good. Indeed, Mrs. Smith, you can't know the blessing of education, or you never would keep poor Lucy out of her schooling. Take my word for it, she will grow up a careless, bad girl, causing you nothing but trouble; so do be warned in time, there's a good soul; let her go to school with the other children; for, if anything goes wrong, depend

upon it the 'sin will lie at your door.'"

But Mrs. Smith "cared for none of these things," and she shut her ears to all admonition.

Mrs. Bell was right. At twelve years of age Lucy was rude and saucy, not only to Mrs. Smith, but to everybody else; she was, besides, from the nature of her early training, or rather, neglect of training, dirty and untidy, so that at length good Mrs. Bell could only grieve over her sad state, and hope that something might occur to cause a change. The parish authorities would gladly have placed her with some one else who would have checked her in her naughtiness, but no one could be found willing to take her now; and even her sister, after one or

two attempts to turn her from her evil ways, was obliged to keep aloof, to avoid the abuse and even blows which she received in return for her sisterly admonitions.

So she continued growing in years and wickedness until she was nineteen, which was about the time when Mary was so useful to Mrs. Bell; when one day, being vexed at a scolding she had had from Mrs. Smith, she ran away, and in a few months they heard that she was married to a worthless fellow, who was known more on account of his depredations on the poultry yards of the villagers, and at the various public-houses for miles round, than for any good that was in him, or any honest work he ever engaged in.

After her marriage, Lucy might be

seen as untidy as usual, her bonnet crushed and dirty, her shawl torn, her gown muddy and ragged, with unlaced boots and soiled stockings, sitting for hours in the little road-side inn, drinking and talking as loudly and profanely as any of the men.

She at length became so depraved, learning more and more evil every day, from the vicious company she kept, that Mary was compelled to give up all intercourse with her, and, except when she occasionally applied to her for pecuniary relief, rarely did they have any conversation.

Thus with both the time wore on, and many months had passed since the sisters had beheld each other.

Mary had been married about a

fortnight, when one evening, her husband having finished his day's work earlier than usual, she dressed herself, to accompany him on a walk to the next town.

They had plenty of time, so there was no occasion to walk fast; they strolled up the quiet lane in which their pretty cottage stood, and, arm linked in arm, proceeded in silence, for their hearts were full of joy, which needed not the use of words to express.

There was no noise to disturb them, but the rippling of a little brook, which, clear as crystal, took its way along one side of the lane, meandering in many a shady nook and grassy dell, and leaping gaily over the shining white pebbles, or shooting into tiny

cascades where it met with a slight embankment to stay its course.

"So these two, happy with each other, and in peace with all the world, walked on in an intensity of enjoyment known only to those whose "trust is in God," and who have "a conscience void of offence."

They went into the town, made their economical purchases, and would have stayed longer gazing at the many attractive shops; but, as they were early risers, it was necessary that they should retire early at night, so they turned their steps homeward; but when they were again in the picturesque spot which was the customary boundary of their evening walks, the beauty of the scene for a moment attracted their attention. The deep crimson of the

setting sun, now nearly below the horizon, shed a glorious light of richest colouring over the lordly chesnut trees which shaded the road, and flickered through the waving branches in a thousand different hues, while the drowsy hum of the twilight insects only served to render the silence the more imposing.

It was a charming scene; but night was now coming on apace, and the increasing darkness warned them to increase their speed; so they stepped on more briskly, anxious to reach home ere it was quite dark; but they had not proceeded far before their attention was again arrested. A melancholy moaning sound, as of some person in pain, struck upon their ears; they listened. "Surely that cannot be the

wind soughing amongst the trees," exclaimed Mary; "it is a dismal wail, and to me sounds like the dying groans of some poor human creature; let us hasten, Henry; may be we can help the poor thing—getting dark too, and perhaps too ill to walk home."

They walked as fast as possible under the circumstances, for every now and then they were obliged to stay and listen for the direction of the groans, which, as they neared their home, became more painfully audible.

At length, the turn of the road brought them to a path on their right, which struck off across some cornfields belonging to their good landlord, and close by was a small plantation of young trees, now thick in foliage, and affording ample shelter from the heat

of the noonday sun, or the heavy dews of a summer's night. As they neared this spot, they could distinguish the voice of a woman, as an occasional cry for mercy was intermingled with the sobs and groans caused by her extreme anguish. They hurried to the spot, and with kindly words and tenderest care Henry raised the poor creature from the earth; the sudden relief overcame her, and she became senseless. Mary cast down her packages on the damp grass, quite forgetful of their valuable contents, for they contained some of the little luxuries just purchased, and, eager to assist her husband in the care of the poor woman, flew to the brook hard by, and in an instant returned with some water to bathe the face and hands of the sufferer. It was some

minutes before their care was rewarded; then, as they felt her returning pulse, they carried her from under the gloomy shade of the trees to the broad road leading to their cottage. The moon now shed its silvery radiance over the landscape, and Henry, resting his burden by the wayside, in the hope that the air would more quickly revive her, looked into his wife's face, as if for guidance how next to proceed.

"We must take her home, dear husband; she is too ill to travel far. I can soon prepare a bed for her, and to-morrow you can get some advice and medicine; if it please God to restore her, we will do our best towards her recovery."

As Mary spoke in gentle accents to her husband, the sick woman uttered

a faint shriek, and again sunk into unconsciousness.

"Oh, be quick, Henry, or she will die before we reach home," cried the trembling Mary; and the good husband, eager as his kind little wife to comfort and sustain the poor sufferer, raised her in his arms, and with rapid steps bore her towards his cottage. They laid her on their own bed, and while Henry hastily procured a light, Mary busied herself in removing the bonnet and shawl, which had hitherto obscured the form and features of the object of their sympathy and kindness. Her clothes were shabby in the last degree; but the bedizened bonnet, the once gay colours of the faded shawl caused a pang to pass through poor Mary's heart, and when the light fell

full on the face of the woman, showing, with a distinctness impossible to be mistaken, the pallid, careworn features, once so pretty—so loved. Mary turned sick, and cold, and faint—it was *her own sister Lucy* she had succoured and brought into her own innocent and happy home.

"Mary's faintness was but temporary, for she was a girl of determined energy and will, and relied not solely on her own powers, but ever looked for help to her Heavenly Father, and she looked not in vain. She was soon enabled to do all that was necessary for the comfort and relief of the invalid; and when the remedies applied began to take effect, and Lucy heard her sister's gentle voice as she spoke in kind and soothing accents, while she

leaned over the bed, a copious flood of tears brought relief to the poor burdened heart, and burying her face in the pillow she sobbed for mercy and forgiveness.

"Most tenderly did Mary nurse this now repentant sister, but her care was of no avail to preserve her life. By degrees the history of her illness, her degradation, and finally the cause of her death, were all revealed to Mary; and she attributed her fearful and unchecked career of vice to the want of that knowledge between good and evil which had been Mary's safeguard and guide. But Mary comforted her in her last hours, and read to her, and prayed with her, and the poor soul, eager for divine instruction, grasped the truth with avidity, and Mary's efforts

were blessed. 'Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her, for she is thy life.'*

"And Lucy died—in the flower of her age—in the early bloom of her youthful beauty. In the midst of her dissipation she was suddenly called to meet that God whose commands she had so often set at nought, and whose precepts she had never cared to learn. SHE DIED; and while Mary deeply mourned at the recollection of what her sister might have been with proper training and judicious instruction, she knelt with her husband at the new-made grave, and thanked God with a full heart for the mercies showered upon them in the blessed advantages of a GOOD EDUCATION."

* Prov. iv. 13.

"Well!" said Mrs. Murray, as Susan closed the book, "that is a very cutting story, and I dare say education *is* a very fine thing; but there's many people in the world who are *forced* to do without it, and they don't all come to a bad end, surely. But we grow wiser every day, that's a fact; and young people are taught now, what grown-up people did not know even when I was a girl. I suppose, Susan, you'll soon be reading so well, that Parson Selwyn will make you teacher in his Sunday School before long?"

Mrs. Murray was prophetic, for Susan was shortly after appointed monitress to one of the Sunday classes, and acquitted herself exceedingly well as a teacher.

She persevered in search after know-

ledge, and while her mind was being developed by the careful and systematic education she daily received, her health improved, she became a handsome, intelligent girl, and at fourteen years of age was of so much use to her mother, and was bringing her in so much money (for she then received three shillings a week, and spent more time at the Rectory) that Mrs. Murray's heart acknowledged the benefit, first only as a temporal cause of thanksgiving, but in due time, touched by the graces of the spirit of holiness, she meekly and humbly blessed God for the enlightenment, and bowed before the Giver of so much good. How did the good pastor rejoice when he beheld the wondrous change in the conduct of this once quarrelsome woman!

Her cottage was no longer the abode of anger and discontent. It was now always peaceful; and, with the combined industry of mother and daughter, assumed an appearance of neatness and cheerfulness, which it never wore while inhabited by ignorance and irreligion.

Yes! and John Murray caught a ray of the great light which illumined his humble dwelling, and, coarse man as he was, he acknowledged the gentle sway of his *educated* daughter, and blessed God for having made *her* perseverance and energy instrumental in eradicating from his mind the dark and mean prejudices against learning by whieh it had hitherto been possessed.

The cottage, "where once all was

ignorance, and all was night," became an abode of comfort, of happiness, and even of elegance—for that term can with justice be applied to the cottages of the lowly, where education will

"THEIR LITTLE WANTS, THEIR LOW DESIRES REFINE,
AND RAISE THE MORTAL TO A HEIGHT DIVINE."

A properly educated mind must be a refined mind, and a refined mind cannot content itself with the mere rough necessaries of daily existence, without endeavouring to make them sources of joy and beauty.

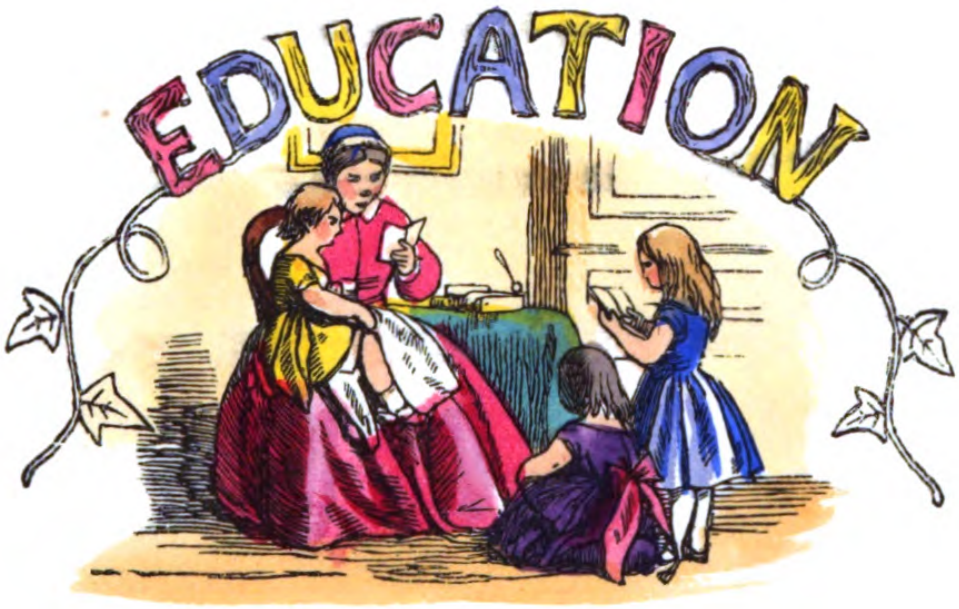
So did this young girl improve the appearance of all within and around their humble home, that it became the admiration of the whole village.

Susan continued her walks to the parsonage until the young ladies were

both married, when Mrs. Murray went to live with the good rector, to keep house for him, while John Murray was employed in the care of the horses and two or three cows which supplied the family with butter and milk. Susan then, not being required by her mother, accepted the kind offer of her younger mistress, and went to live with her a few miles from her own native village.

There must we bid her "farewell," leaving her engaged in the delightful task of instructing three rosy children in the first lessons of knowledge and self-government. Susan was a comfort and a blessing to her parents—a faithful and invaluable servant; and, throughout her most useful and happy life, proved the glorious advantages, and by her good example continually

pourtrayed, in bright and glowing colours, the wholesome effects, of a well-ordered and systematic



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