

THE POOR MAN'S DAUGHTER.

by

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Women are frail too,
Ay, as the glasses where they view themselves,
Which are as easy broke as they make forms.
Women! help Heaven! men their creation mar
In profiting by them. SHAKESPEARE.

On the right hand side of the road from Kilrush to Clare lie the ruins of a poor cottage, which was lately inhabited by a peasant who enjoyed the singular felicity of being contented with the gifts which Fortune had bestowed upon him. This poor but honest man exemplified daily the compatibility of divine and moral laws; for whilst, in the field, he endured the 'penalty of Adam,' he was never known to act contrarily to the most rigid integrity, always blessing Heaven for his share of worldly things, and never repining because he saw profusion bestowed upon others less grateful. The Christian, who is taught to expect rewards hereafter, is not always so purified from terrestrial hopes as not to retain much of the Israelites' creed in anticipating some manifestation of Heaven: perhaps it is only the vanity of human nature which increases the value of possessions by attributing them to Divine interposition; or it may be owing to the exaggeration of partiality, which sets such an exorbitant value on the gift, that nothing less than Omnipotence could bestow it: certain it is we are either willing to flatter ourselves by an indirect approval of our conduct, or we endeavour to account for that which is enveloped in mystery by acknowledging 'all is of God.' This poor man's possessions were few, but these were of great value to him: his health enabled him to live independently of absolute want, and his daughter Sally endeared him to that life which he laboured to prolong. These two gifts (for such he called them) were to him such a blessing and such a happiness, that his gratitude to Heaven was incessant, being his first acknowledgment in the morning, and the last in the evening; and so inter twined were both with his existence, that the loss of one would have destroyed his enjoyment of the other.

Beauty is the gift of Nature; and, as equal care is bestowed on the formation of all, it is no wonder that the daughters of Poverty are sometimes handsome. Sally was one of those perfect figures which could only be conceived by the genius of Phidias, but never could be portrayed by the chisel of a statuary; nor did the beauty of her face lessen the admiration which her form excited, being at once intelligent, animated, and lovely. Sally was blessed by the aged, and beloved by the youthful; and so docile was her disposition, and so unaffected her manners, that envy was found nowhere to lessen the general esteem in which she was held; whilst the absence of vicious great ness from that part of the country awakened no apprehension that guilt would be allured to the destruction of virtue, beauty, and innocence. Every blessing brings with it something to detract from human happiness, on the same principle that no metal is found unaccompanied by alloy; and, were not many evils entailed upon Ireland by the wilful expatriation of the aristocracy, their absence might be pardoned for the security which it affords to unsuspecting virtue. If the non-existence of crime be a proof of innocence, the Irish peasantry are entitled to the praise of enviable morality; for cases of

seduction are seldom known among them, whilst the incontinent are disallowed, by public reprobation, to consort with society.

Sally, accustomed to playmates innocent as herself, apprehended no evil from associating with those who, though now growing fast to manhood, were once her school fellows; and, being ignorant of the nature of crime, her conduct was not regulated by any fears of indiscretion: she was seen joyful in the harvest-field, where her sex are found, in Ireland, gladdening the reaper's toil; and on the farmer's floor her smile dispensed pleasure among her companions, whether spinning or quilting. Sally's cheerfulness of temper was so well known, and her simple powers of pleasing so well acknowledged, that she was never unemployed, as all were eager to have her in their family. The little sums thus acquired by laudable industry she regularly deposited in her father's hand, whose approving kiss was the best reward of duty: she knew her father was poor, and this knowledge regulated her economy. When: going to market with eggs or poultry, she saved her Sunday shoes by walking within a mile of the town bare-footed,* and kept every gown twelve months before she put it on of a week-day: the superfluity of a new-patterned handkerchief was purchased by the labour of after-hours; and one riband cost her the minute savings of six months.

* Notwithstanding the privations of the peasantry in Ireland, no people possess a greater desire for decency. The following extract: from 'A Report of the present state of the disturbed Districts in the South of Ireland', the author knows to be candid and true:

"They are so much attached to dress, that they would deprive: themselves of sufficient food, and live on one meal of potatoes in the day without complaint, to obtain good clothing: their being in rags, therefore, is a strong indication of extreme misery. They are exceedingly partial to shoes and stockings, the want of which they consider a degradation; those who find difficulty in procuring them seldom wear any, except on holidays and Sundays; and, in travelling, carry them in their hands, for the sake of economy, and of having their feet unconfined on the journey. The women travel to chapel and to fairs on the same principle until they get near their destination, when they stop to wash their feet, and put them on."

Nor was her father less laboriously careful: he often walked three miles a day to work for sixpence; and, when even that could not be procured, his little field behind his hut was prepared for the future supply of potatoes. The reward of industry was evident in the poor man's cottage; one room was filled with an annual supply of the national esculent, and the little white dresser had many rows of variegated delf; whilst warm clothes were worn by the old man, and neat ones by his daughter every Sunday at chapel. As Sally approached her eighteenth year, it is not to be supposed she wanted admirers: many paid her attention, but her preference distinguished a youth who was serving his time to a rustic carpenter. This lad had given so many proofs of industry and application to his business, that the old man readily consented to his being admitted as Sally's future husband. Tom O'Driscoll (this young man's name) anticipated so much felicity in the society of Sally, when religion had sanctioned their union, that he waited with impatience for the expiration of his apprenticeship; but, as he was to live by labour, he could not be too soon industrious: he therefore employed his leisure hours in preparing for housekeeping by making half a dozen oak chairs, two tables, and a bedstead. Sally admired this proof of his wishes to make her happy, and cheered the drooping age of her father by sly insinuations of the cradle; and more than once, by studied mistake, called him grandfather. Happiness was visible in the poor man's countenance as the idea of seeing himself perpetuated in a future race darted into his face—like the flash of sunbeams on a dilapidated ruin, making decay more apparent.

Thus the old man continued to be happy, and the young people lived in anticipation of their future felicity, when a stranger one day stepped into the cottage where Sally was spinning, and asked for a drink of water, which was given him, not without many apologies for not having something better. The day being warm, the stranger prolonged his stay, under the pretence of resting, whilst he insidiously was profiting by the inexperience of this unsuspecting girl, collecting from her candid answers the history of her circumstances; and, on his going away, slipped into her hand a note, whilst his quick departure prevented her from returning the undeserved remuneration for a seat and a drink of water. Money has charms for all: even those who are unable to resist it, when surreptitiously offered, are always ingenious in fabricating excuses for retaining it. Sally, after a moment's doubt, concluded her visitor was one of those amiable characters mentioned in fairy tales, who 'do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame.' His liberality was evident, whilst his motive could not but be pure, as he was neither displeasingly familiar nor known in the country. She never expected to see him again, as he did not promise to return. These thoughts were dissipated by the entrance of a travelling pedlar, who, spreading out his wares, succeeded in tempting Sally to become a purchaser of garters, ribands, scissors, and pins, for which she paid with the stranger's note; but no sooner was the itinerant merchant gone than a difficulty arose in her mind that she could not overcome but by concealment: her father was to remain ignorant of the transaction, not so much from a fear of his anger, as that it should give him trouble; for he had sometimes lately dwelt on the danger of girls accepting presents from men, particularly from those whose superior station in life precluded any degree of intimacy.

Sally was the next day at her usual task, like when, at the same hour as before, the stranger made his appearance: a better dress and greater confidence were the only difference she could perceive. As he told her he was then on his return homewards, it seemed to account for this second visit; and, as he kissed her cheek on going away, she thought there was no occasion to be angry, the gentleman being young and handsome, To Sally's surprise he came the next day, bringing with him a silk handkerchief, which he familiarly tied round her neck; and, on her signifying her displeasure by a repulse, he fell on his knees, whilst, in terms the most passionate, he declared his love, calling heaven and earth to witness his honourable intentions: acknowledging her beauty, he indignantly spurned the idea of hiding such excellence in retirement, telling her, as he tumultuously kissed her hand, that he had rank and fortune to bestow upon her the moment she would honour him with her heart. The high and cultivated have been found too weak in resisting the seducer's art: no wonder, then, that simple girls have been ensnared. Sally, on hearing the compliments bestowed upon her, examined her glass, and believed herself handsome: whilst the earnestness of her admirer appeared like sincerity, his gentlemanly appearance and refined address gained upon her heart, until at length she consented to become his bride.

The evening fixed on for her departure from her father's cottage was early in the month of May; and, as it approached, she regarded it not without dread. Her lover might be false, and the bare possibility of his being so was sufficient to awaken the keenest apprehension: but his promises were fair, and she relied upon them and the strength of her own virtue. The evening came, and, as if it were to be the last, her rustic lover paid her a visit: a few days were to terminate his servitude, when the whole of his acquired and created property was to be removed to his wife's abode, and this evening himself and the old man were regulating how they should dispose of it.

Several times he inquired if Sally was ill, she looked so dejected; and several times he pressed her hand, to give her courage to overcome what he thought were maiden apprehensions. Never was he happier than on his departure that night; for Sally, knowing he was deceived, though he was still dear to her, gave him an ardent kiss, which, if interpreted rightly, said, 'This is the last.' At length the hour came: Sally was ready; and, taking farewell of her unconscious and sleeping father, joined her lover, who quickly conveyed her to Ennis, where she had courage enough to demand the fulfilment of his promise. Her lover knew he had conquered her heart, but he dared not venture to invade her virtue: to satisfy her, and escape, as he thought, with impunity, he took her to a rejected priest, significantly called, in Ireland, '*Tack-em*,' where the ceremony was performed; but, when concluded, the clergyman required, as well as his fee, the bridegroom's signature, acknowledging his marriage, at the same time handing Sally her certificate. Often are the protections of virtue mysteriously evinced: this villain thought the unfortunate priest was too ignorant and too wicked to note the marriage; and the surprise of the unexpected discovery of his error so confounded him, that, in the confusion of his own ideas, he signed the book Richard M'Naughton.

The birth of the crime,' says an eloquent orator, speaking of seduction, "'is the death of enjoyment:' M'Naughton was no sooner satiated with the company of his wife than he wished to be freed from her. Her innocent appeals to his love were tiresome; her affectionate fondness was troublesome. He took her to Killarney, under the pretence of amusement; settled in a neat cottage; and bought a boat, for the purpose of sailing on its delightful; lakes. Here he lived from all society but that of Sally; and a confidential man—apparently kind, but often dejected and gloomy. One evening he pretended business to the next town, desiring his man to amuse his mistress by sailing on the waters, which impart a thousand beauties to the islands and hills of Killarney. Sally, all confidence, apprehended, no danger; but was: surprised in the evening to find her husband, on his return, outrageously turbulent, directing all his anger towards his devoted servant; whilst the cause was as unknown to her, as this conduct was inexplicable.

The next evening M'Naughton, accompanied by Sally and his man, went on the lakes as usual. It was in the midst of summer: all Nature rejoiced in the beauties of creation, and romantic loveliness every way met the gazer's eye, whilst his ears were feasted with the melody of a thousand echoes, reciprocally repeated from dell and hill. Every valley was an undulated expanse of water; and from every rock tum bled, in harmonious cadence, a natural cascade. Yet, enchanting as all around really was, Sally was the loveliest object which the sun then illumined: her heart, attuned by innocent gaiety to the charms of every beauteous scene, was this evening full of the sublime imagery which the hand of Nature has here unsparingly pictured; and, as if the conceptions of the soul were delineated in the features, Sally's face showed an accordant sublimity with what her eyes beheld. Cursed Ambition! thy withering maledictions blast the fair impressions of virtuous beauty, and blind thy votaries to the pleasure of sublime conceptions: no object is too lovely to escape immolation on thy guilty altar; and no crime too heinous, when the perpetration is to facilitate an admission to thy rewards. Poor Sally fell a sacrifice to thy atrocious spirit!

The father of Sally, and her betrothed husband, O'Driscoll, alarmed by the flight of the common object of their affections, pursued her, with unceasing solicitude, from town to town, and had on this evening arrived in Killarney, where they got intelligence of Sally's retreat. On going to the cottage they discovered that

herself and paramour were in the boat on the lake: glad of once more having the prospect of beholding his child, the old man, supported by O'Driscoll, clambered over rock and hill until they got a view of the boat as it drifted along with the current of the water. The sight of the poor man's child drew from his reverend eyes a flood of tears; nor could O'Driscoll refrain from weeping as he vowed revenge on her seducer. For some time they could view the easy progress of the boat; but a turn in the lake, and an intervening hill, hid it from their sight, when presently they heard a dreadful scream; another and another—fainter and fainter. A thousand fears for Sally rushed upon her father, who, gaining the summit of the hill, saw, immediately under him, the dead body of his child cast into the water, where it instantly sunk. "Murderous villains!" he exclaimed, and fell into O'Driscoll's arms.

On recovering, the old man directed O'Driscoll to look down the precipice, but all there was silent: on the opposite side of the lake they saw the boat without any one in it. 'Alas!' said the poor man, 'we came one hour too late to save Sally from destruction; but let us secure her body, and lay it beside her mother, where I now wish to be laid myself.' The town where they went for assistance was not far off: the people came in crowds to see if such imputed atrocity was true, and could not be convinced until the body of Sally was dragged on shore, mutilated and disfigured. A general sensation of horror was spread through the country, and the fearless conduct of one youthful magistrate apprehended the murderer, M'Naughton, who, it appeared, was allied to some families of the highest respectability in Ireland, whose interest with the executive was so powerful that the judge who tried him, acting in a manner which would have immortalized a Roman, ordered his immediate execution lest a reprieve might be obtained.

Twelve months after, the guilty servant of M'Naughton was tried and convicted: before execution he confessed that his master was on the eve of being married to a young lady of fortune, provided by his sister; and that, fearing the claim of Sally might be substantiated, he resolved to murder her. For this purpose he made his man provide a large club, a heavy stone to tie to the corpse for sinking it, and sent him out with her to perform the deed singly: but, said the culprit, as I raised the club in a threatening manner, she, thinking I was only frightening her, gave me a smile so sweet and innocent that I could not strike. For this his master was displeased on the last night of Sally's existence; he having the next evening perpetrated the murder himself.

Virtue is most lovely when it comes in a pleasing form; and murder, however dreadful, is seen with aggravated horror when youth and beauty are the victims. The impression made in Ireland by the fate of Sally is still fresh in the memory of all. The old recite her history for its example to credulous maids and the young listen to it because it is romantic and strange: its truth is too well attested to be doubted, and the criminal records of the country retain the particulars of the atrocious transaction. The father of Sally soon joined the remains of his injured daughter; and O'Driscoll never passes the ruins of the cottage without praying for their repose, laying the emphasis of invocation on the name of Sally, the anniversary of whose death is yet remembered by her former companions, who on that fatal day, strew her green grave with friendly-woven wreaths of many-scented flowers—votive offerings of pure esteem to the memory of the hapless woman who lies beneath.