

Wollstonecraft Mary

Mary Wollstonecraft's Original Stories



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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The germ of the *Original Stories* was, I imagine, a suggestion (in the manner of publishers) from Mary Wollstonecraft's employer, Johnson of St. Paul's Churchyard, that something more or less in the manner of Mrs. Trimmer's *History of the Robins*, the great nursery success of 1786, might be a profitable speculation. For I doubt if the production of a book for children would ever have occurred spontaneously to an author so much more interested in the status of women and other adult matters. However, the idea being given her, she quickly wrote the book – in 1787 or 1788 – carrying out in it to a far higher power, in Mrs. Mason, the self-confidence and rectitude of Mrs. Trimmer's leading lady, Mrs. Benson, who in her turn had been preceded by that other flawless instructor of youth, Mr. Barlow. None of these exemplars could do wrong; but the Mrs. Mason whom we meet in the following pages far transcends the others in conscious merit. Mrs. Benson in the *History of the Robins* (with the author of which Mary Wollstonecraft was on friendly terms)

was sufficiently like the Protagonist of the Old Testament to be, when among Mrs. Wilson's bees, 'excessively pleased with the ingenuity and industry with which these insects collect their honey and wax, form their cells, and deposit their store'; but Mrs. Mason, as we shall see, went still farther.

It has to be remembered that the *Original Stories* were written when the author was twenty-nine, five years before she met Gilbert Imlay and six years before her daughter Fanny Imlay was born. I mention this fact because it seems to me to be very significant. I feel that had the book been written after Fanny's birth, or even after the Imlay infatuation, it would have been somewhat different: not perhaps more entertaining, because its author had none of that imaginative sympathy with the young which would direct her pen in the direction of pure pleasure for them; but more human, more kindly, better. One can have indeed little doubt as to this after reading those curious first lessons for an infant which came from Mary Wollstonecraft's pen in or about 1795, (printed in volume two of the *Posthumous Works*, 1798), and which give evidence of so much more tenderness and reasonableness (and at the same time want of Reason, which may have been Godwin's God but will never stand in that relation either to English men or English children) than the monitress of the *Original Stories*, the impeccable Mrs. Mason, ever suggests. I know of no early instance where a mother talks down to an infant more prettily: continually descending herself to its level, yet never with any of Mrs. Mason's arrogance and superiority.

Not indeed that this poor mother, with her impulsive warm heart wounded, and most of her illusions gone, and few kindly eyes resting upon her, could ever have compassed much of Mrs. Mason's prosperous self-satisfaction and authority had she wished to; for in the seven years between the composition of the *Original Stories* and the lessons for the minute Fanny Imlay, she had lived an emotional lifetime, and suffering much, pitied much.

In Lesson X, which I quote, although it says nothing of charity or kindness, a vastly more human spirit is found than in any of Mrs. Mason's homilies on our duty to the afflicted: —

See how much taller you are than William. In four years you have learned to eat, to walk, to talk. Why do you smile? You can do much more, you think: you can wash your hands and face. Very well. I should never kiss a dirty face. And you can comb your head with the pretty comb you always put by in your own drawer. To be sure, you do all this to be ready to take a walk with me. You would be obliged to stay at home, if you could not comb your own hair. Betty is busy getting the dinner ready, and only brushes William's hair, because he cannot do it for himself.

Betty is making an apple-pye. You love an apple-pye; but I do not bid you make one. Your hands are not strong enough to mix the butter and flour together; and you must not try to pare the apples, because you cannot manage a great knife.

Never touch the large knives: they are very sharp, and you might cut your finger to the bone. You are a little girl, and ought to have a little knife. When you are as tall as I am, you shall have a knife as large as mine; and when you

are as strong as I am, and have learned to manage it, you will not hurt yourself.

You can trundle a hoop, you say; and jump over a stick. O, I forgot! – and march like men in the red coats, when papa plays a pretty tune on the fiddle.

Even a very little of the tender spirit that this lesson breathes, even a very little of its sense of play, would have leavened the *Original Stories* into a more wholesome consistency. As it stands, that book is one of the most perfect examples of the success with which, a century or more ago, any ingratiating quality could be kept out of a work for the young. According to William Godwin, his unhappy wife had always a pretty and endearing way with children. Yet of pretty and endearing ways, as of humour, I take him to have been a bad judge; for I do not think that any woman possessing enough sympathy to attach children to her as he, in one of the most curious biographies in the language, assures us that she had, could have suppressed the gift so completely in her first book for young minds. And the Mrs. Masonic character of her own Preface supports my view.

I do not wish to suggest that previous to 1787 Mary Wollstonecraft had been a stranger to suffering. Far from it. Her life had known little joy. Her father's excesses, her mother's grief and poverty, her sister's misfortunes, her own homelessness, and, to crown all, the death of her close friend Frances Blood, must have dimmed if not obliterated most of her happy impulses. But it is one thing to suffer bereavement and to be anxious about the

troubles of others near and dear; and it is quite another to suffer oneself by loving, even to a point of personal disaster, and then losing both that love and the friendliness (such as it was) of the world. Imlay's desertion and the birth of Fanny were real things beside which a drunken father, unhappy sisters, and a dead friend were mere trifles.

This little book is to my mind chiefly interesting for two reasons apart from its original purpose – for the light it throws on the attitude of the nursery authors of that day towards children, and for the character of Mrs. Mason, a type of the dominant British character, in petticoats, here for the first time (so far as my reading goes) set on paper.

I have no information regarding the success of the *Original Stories* in their day, and such spirited efforts as are now made to obtain them by collectors are, we know, due rather to Blake than to Mary Wollstonecraft; but any measure of popularity that they may have enjoyed illustrates the awful state of slavery in which the children of the seventeen-nineties must have subsisted. It is indeed wonderful to me to think that only a poor hundred years ago such hard and arid presentations of adult perfection and infantile incapacity should have been considered, even by capable writers, all that the intelligence of children needed or their tender inexperience deserved. I do not deny that children are not to-day too much considered: indeed, I think that they are: I think there is now an unfortunate tendency to provide them with literature in such variety as to anticipate, and possibly supplant,

the most valuable natural workings of their minds in almost every direction; but such activity at any rate indicates a desire on the part of the writers of these books to understand their readers, whereas I can detect none in the *Original Stories* or in hundreds of kindred works of that day. *Sandford and Merton* and Mrs. Trimmer's book stand apart: there is much humanity and imaginative sympathy in both; but with the majority of nursery authors, to fling down a collection of homilies was sufficient.

The odd thing is that every one was equally thoughtless: it is not merely that Mary Wollstonecraft should consider such an intellectual stone as Chapter XV worth preparing for poor little fellow creatures that needed bread; but that her publisher Johnson should consider it the kind of thing to send forth, and that, with artists capable of dramatic interest available, he should hand the commission to illustrate it to William Blake, who, exquisitely charming as were his drawings for his own *Songs*, was as yet in no sense of the word an ingratiating illustrator of narratives of real life for young eyes. And there still remains the parent or friend who, picking up the book in a shop, considered it the kind of thing to strike a bliss into the soul of Master Henry or Miss Susan as a birthday present. It is all, at this date, so incredible, so shortsighted, so cruel, one could almost say. No one seems to have tried at all: the idea of wooing a child was not in the air – certainly Mary Wollstonecraft had none of it.

Who it was that first discerned the child to be a thing of joy, a character apart worth coming to without patronage, a

flower, a fairy, I cannot say. But Blake, in his writings, had much to do with the discovery, and Wordsworth perhaps more. Certain, however, is it that Mary Wollstonecraft, even if she had glimmerings of this truth, had no more; and those she suppressed when the pen was in her hand.

I might remark here that the circumstance that Blake's drawings for Salzmann's *Elements of Morality*, which Mary Wollstonecraft translated in 1791, also for Johnson, are more interesting and dramatic, is due to the fact that he merely adapted the work of the German artist. Blake was uniformly below himself in this kind of employment. Only in the rapt freedoms of the angelic harper in his hut, in the picture opposite page 56 of the present work, does he approach his true genius; while in his conception of Mrs. Mason I have no confidence. Not slim and willowy and pensive was she in my mental picture of her: I figure a matron of sterner stuff and solider build.

But having said this against the *Original Stories*, I have said all, for as the casket enshrining Mrs. Mason its value remains unassailable.

It was well for Mrs. Mason that Mary Wollstonecraft set her on paper in 1788. Had she waited until the *Vindication of the Rights of Women* was written in 1792 (and dedicated to Talleyrand), had she waited until little Fanny Imlay was born into a stony world, Mrs. Mason would never have been. Because it is the likes of Mrs. Mason that keep the rights of women, as Mary Wollstonecraft saw them, in the background, and demand

the production of marriage lines. Mrs. Mason would have been the first to regret the unwomanliness of the publication both of the book and of the baby. The Preface to this book suggests that Mary Wollstonecraft was at that time, before she had loved and lost and suffered, something of a Mrs. Mason herself; but Mrs. Mason remained Masonic to the end, whereas poor Mary's heart and mind were always in conflict. She may have loved pure Reason, but she loved Gilbert Imlay too. And this Mrs. Mason never did.

Mrs. Mason never nods. Her tact, her mental reaction, her confidence, her sense of duty and knowledge of duty, are alike marvellous. When the higher mercy compels her to end a wounded lark's misery by putting her foot on its head, she 'turns her own the other way'. At the close of a walk during which her charges have been 'rational', she shakes hands with them. Her highest praise to Mary, after the fruit-picking incident on page 40, is to call her 'my friend'; 'and she deserved the name,' adds the lady, 'for she was no longer a child.' No child could be her friend. One wonders what she made of the beautiful words 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me.. for of such is the kingdom of Heaven'; but of course she did not know them: her Testament was obviously the Old.

Yet we have, as it happens, a comment on Christ's remark, in her statement on page 8, made in one of her recurring monologues on superiority and inferiority, that it is 'only to animals that children *can* do good'. Mrs. Mason's expression

of alarm and dismay on hearing the words 'A little child shall lead them' could be drawn adequately, one feels, only by Mary Wollstonecraft's friend Fuseli.

'I govern my servants and you,' said Mrs. Mason, 'by attending strictly to truth, and this observance keeping my head clear and my heart pure, I am ever ready to pray to the Author of Good, the Fountain of truth.' She never paid unmeaning compliments, (and here it is interesting to compare the second paragraph of Mary Wollstonecraft's Preface, where she plays at being a Mrs. Mason too), or permitted any word to drop from her tongue that her heart did not dictate. Hence she allowed Mrs. Trimmer's *History of the Robins* to be lent to a little girl, only on condition that the little girl should be made to understand that birds cannot really talk. She had in her garden, although large, only one bed of tulips, because the tulip flaunts, whereas the rose, of which she had a profusion, is modest. That God made both does not seem to have troubled her. She thought that the poor who were willing to work 'had a right to the comforts of life'. During a thunderstorm she walked with the same security as when the sun enlivened the prospect, since her love of virtue had overcome her fear of death. She was weaned from the world, 'but not disgusted.' When she visited those who have been reduced from their original place in society by misfortunes, she made such alterations in her dress as would suggest ceremony, lest too much familiarity should appear like disrespect. She forbade Caroline to cry when in pain, because the Most High was educating her

for eternity. She thought that all diseases were sent to children by the Almighty to teach them patience and fortitude. She never sought bargains, wishing every one to receive the just value for their goods; and when her two charges at last left her, to return to their father, she dismissed them with the words, 'You are now candidates for my friendship, and on your advancement in virtue my regard will in future depend.'

The great fault of Mrs. Mason is that she had none. One seems to understand why her own children and husband died so quickly.

Since I have read this little book a new kind of nightmare has come into my slumbers: I dream that I am walking with Mrs. Mason. The greatness and goodness of Mrs. Mason surround me, dominate me, suffocate me. With head erect, vigilant eye, and a smile of assurance and tolerance on her massive features, she sails on and on, holding my neatly-gloved hand, discoursing ever of the infinite mercy of God, the infinite paltriness of myself, and the infinite success of Mrs. Mason. I think that Mrs. Mason's most terrible characteristic to me (who have never been quite sure of anything) is the readiness with which her decisions spring fully-armed from her brain. She knows not only everything, but herself too: she has no doubts. Here she joins hands with so much that is most triumphant in the British character. The Briton also is without doubts. He marches forward. He is right. It is when I contemplate him in this mood – and Mrs. Mason too – that I most wonder who my ancestors can have been.

The awful reality of Mrs. Mason proves that Mary

Wollstonecraft, had she known her own power and kept her mental serenity, might have been a great novelist. Mrs. Mason was the first and strongest British Matron. She came before Mrs. Proudie, and also, it is interesting to note, before Sir Willoughby Patterne. But she was, I fear, an accident; for there is nothing like her in our author's one experiment in adult fiction, *The Wrongs of Woman*.

E. V. LUCAS.

PREFACE

These conversations and tales are accommodated to the present state of society; which obliges the author to attempt to cure those faults by reason, which might never to have taken root in the infant mind. Good habits, imperceptibly fixed, are far preferable to the precepts of reason; but, as this task requires more judgment than generally falls to the lot of parents, substitutes must be sought for, and medicines given, when regimen would have answered the purpose much better. I believe those who examine their own minds, will readily agree with me, that reason, with difficulty, conquers settled habits, even when it is arrived at some degree of maturity: why then do we suffer children to be bound with fetters, which their half-formed faculties cannot break.

In writing the following work, I aim at perspicuity and simplicity of style; and try to avoid those unmeaning compliments, which slip from the tongue, but have not the least connexion with the affections that should warm the heart, and animate the conduct. By this false politeness, sincerity is sacrificed, and truth violated; and thus artificial manners are necessarily taught. For true politeness is a polish, not a varnish; and should rather be acquired by observation than admonition. And we may remark, by way of illustration, that men do not attempt to polish precious stones, till age and air have given

them that degree of solidity, which will enable them to bear the necessary friction, without destroying the main substance.

The way to render instruction most useful cannot always be adopted; knowledge should be gradually imparted, and flow more from example than teaching: example directly addresses the senses, the first inlets to the heart; and the improvement of those instruments of the understanding is the object education should have constantly in view, and over which we have most power. But to wish that parents would, themselves, mould the ductile passions, is a chimerical wish, for the present generation have their own passions to combat with, and fastidious pleasures to pursue, neglecting those pointed out by nature: we must therefore pour premature knowledge into the succeeding one; and, teaching virtue, explain the nature of vice. Cruel necessity!

The Conversations are intended to assist the teacher as well as the pupil; and this will obviate an objection which some may start, that the sentiments are not quite on a level with the capacity of a child. Every child requires a different mode of treatment; but a writer can only choose one, and that must be modified by those who are actually engaged with young people in their studies.

The tendency of the reasoning obviously tends to fix principles of truth and humanity on a solid and simple foundation; and to make religion an active, invigorating director of the affections, and not a mere attention to forms. Systems of Theology may be complicated, but when the character of the Supreme Being is displayed, and He is recognised as the Universal Father, the

Author and Centre of Good, a child may be led to comprehend that dignity and happiness must arise from imitating Him; and this conviction should be twisted into – and be the foundation of every inculcated duty.

At any rate, the Tales, which were written to illustrate the moral, may recall it, when the mind has gained sufficient strength to discuss the argument from which it was deduced.

INTRODUCTION

Mary and Caroline, though the children of wealthy parents were, in their infancy, left entirely to the management of servants, or people equally ignorant. Their mother died suddenly, and their father, who found them very troublesome at home, placed them under the tuition of a woman of tenderness and discernment, a near relation, who was induced to take on herself the important charge through motives of compassion.

They were shamefully ignorant, considering that Mary had been fourteen, and Caroline twelve years in the world. If they had been merely ignorant, the task would not have appeared so arduous; but they had caught every prejudice that the vulgar casually instill. In order to eradicate these prejudices, and substitute good habits instead of those they had carelessly contracted, Mrs. Mason never suffered them to be out of her sight. They were allowed to ask questions on all occasions, a method she would not have adopted, had she educated them from the first, according to the suggestions of her own reason, to which experience had given its sanction.

They had tolerable capacities; but Mary had a turn for ridicule, and Caroline was vain of her person. She was, indeed, very handsome, and the inconsiderate encomiums that had, in her presence, been lavished on her beauty made her, even at that early age, affected.

CHAPTER I

The treatment of animals. – The ant. – The bee. – Goodness. – The lark's nest. – The asses.

One fine morning in spring, some time after Mary and Caroline were settled in their new abode, Mrs. Mason proposed a walk before breakfast, a custom she wished to teach imperceptibly, by rendering it amusing.

The sun had scarcely dispelled the dew that hung on every blade of grass, and filled the half-shut flowers; every prospect smiled, and the freshness of the air conveyed the most pleasing sensations to Mrs. Mason's mind; but the children were regardless of the surrounding beauties, and ran eagerly after some insects to destroy them. Mrs. Mason silently observed their cruel sports, without appearing to do it; but stepping suddenly out of the foot-path into the long grass, her buckle was caught in it, and striving to disentangle herself, she wet her feet; which the children knew she wished to avoid, as she had been lately sick. This circumstance roused their attention; and they forgot their amusement to enquire why she had left the path; and Mary could hardly restrain a laugh, when she was informed that it was to avoid treading on some snails that were creeping across the narrow footway. Surely, said Mary, you do not think there is any harm in killing a snail, or any of those nasty creatures that crawl

on the ground? I hate them, and should scream if one was to find its way from my clothes to my neck! With great gravity, Mrs. Mason asked how she dared to kill any thing, unless it were to prevent its hurting her? Then, resuming a smiling face, she said, Your education has been neglected, my child; as we walk along attend to what I say, and make the best answers you can; and do you, Caroline, join in the conversation.

You have already heard that God created the world, and every inhabitant of it. He is then called the Father of all creatures; and all are made to be happy, whom a good and wise God has created. He made those snails you despise, and caterpillars, and spiders; and when He made them, did not leave them to perish, but placed them where the food that is most proper to nourish them is easily found. They do not live long, but He who is their Father, as well as your's, directs them to deposit their eggs on the plants that are fit to support their young, when they are not able to get food for themselves. – And when such a great and wise Being has taken care to provide every thing necessary for the meanest creature, would you dare to kill it, merely because it appears to you ugly? Mary began to be attentive, and quickly followed Mrs. Mason's example, who allowed a caterpillar and a spider to creep on her hand. You find them, she rejoined, very harmless; but a great number would destroy our vegetables and fruit; so birds are permitted to eat them, as we feed on animals; and in spring there are always more than at any other season of the year, to furnish food for the young broods. – Half convinced,

Mary said, but worms are of little consequence in the world. Yet, replied Mrs. Mason, God cares for them, and gives them every thing that is necessary to render their existence comfortable. You are often troublesome – I am stronger than you – yet I do not kill you.

Observe those ants; they have a little habitation in yonder hillock; they carry food to it for their young, and sleep very snug in it during the cold weather. The bees also have comfortable towns, and lay up a store of honey to support them when the flowers die, and snow covers the ground: and this forecast is as much the gift of God, as any quality you possess.

Do you know the meaning of the word Goodness? I see you are unwilling to answer. I will tell you. It is, first, to avoid hurting any thing; and then, to contrive to give as much pleasure as you can. If some insects are to be destroyed, to preserve my garden from desolation, I have it done in the quickest way. The domestic animals that I keep, I provide the best food for, and never suffer them to be tormented; and this caution arises from two motives: – I wish to make them happy; and, as I love my fellow-creatures still better than the brute creation, I would not allow those that I have any influence over, to grow habitually thoughtless and cruel, till they were unable to relish the greatest pleasure life affords, – that of resembling God, by doing good.

A lark now began to sing, as it soared aloft. The children watched its motions, listening to the artless melody. They wondered what it was thinking of – of its young family, they

soon concluded; for it flew over the hedge, and drawing near, they heard the young ones chirp. Very soon both the old birds took their flight together, to look for food to satisfy the craving of the almost fledged young. An idle boy, who had borrowed a gun, fired at them – they fell; and before he could take up the wounded pair, he perceived Mrs. Mason; and expecting a very severe reprimand, ran away. She and the little girls drew near, and found that one was not much hurt; but that the other, the cock, had one leg broken, and both its wings shattered; and its little eyes seemed starting out of their sockets, it was in such exquisite pain. The children turned away their eyes. Look at it, said Mrs. Mason; do you not see that it suffers as much, and more than you did when you had the small-pox, when you were so tenderly nursed. Take up the hen; I will bind her wing together; perhaps it may heal. As to the cock, though I hate to kill any thing, I must put him out of pain; to leave him in his present state would be cruel; and avoiding an unpleasant sensation myself, I should allow the poor bird to die by inches, and call this treatment tenderness, when it would be selfishness or weakness. Saying so, she put her foot on the bird's head, turning her own another way.

They walked on; when Caroline remarked, that the nestlings, deprived of their parents, would now perish; and the mother began to flutter in her hand as they drew near the hedge, though the poor creature could not fly, yet she tried to do it. The girls, with one voice, begged Mrs. Mason to let them take the nest, and provide food in a cage, and see if the mother could not

contrive to hop about to feed them. The nest and the old mother were instantly in Mary's handkerchief. A little opening was left to admit the air; and Caroline peeped into it every moment to see how they looked. I give you leave, said Mrs. Mason, to take those birds, because an accident has rendered them helpless; if that had not been the case, they should not have been confined.

They had scarcely reached the next field, when they met another boy with a nest in his hand, and on a tree near him saw the mother, who, forgetting her natural timidity, followed the spoiler; and her intelligible tones of anguish reached the ears of the children, whose hearts now first felt the emotions of humanity. Caroline called him, and taking sixpence out of her little purse, offered to give it to him for the nest, if he would shew her where he had taken it from. The boy consented, and away ran Caroline to replace it, – crying all the way, how delighted the old bird will be to find her brood again. The pleasure that the parent-bird would feel was talked of till they came to a large common, and heard some young asses, at the door of an hovel, making a most dreadful noise. Mrs. Mason had ordered the old ones to be confined, lest the young should suck before the necessary quantity had been saved for some sick people in her neighbourhood. But after they had given the usual quantity of milk, the thoughtless boy had left them still in confinement, and the young in vain implored the food nature designed for their particular support. Open the hatch, said Mrs. Mason, the mothers have still enough left to satisfy their young. It was opened, and

they saw them suck.

Now, said she, we will return to breakfast; give me your hands, my little girls, you have done good this morning, you have acted like rational creatures. Look, what a fine morning it is. Insects, birds, and animals, are all enjoying this sweet day. Thank God for permitting you to see it, and for giving you an understanding which teaches you that you ought, by doing good, to imitate Him. Other creatures only think of supporting themselves; but man is allowed to ennoble his nature, by cultivating his mind and enlarging his heart. He feels disinterested love; every part of the creation affords an exercise for virtue, and virtue is ever the truest source of pleasure.

CHAPTER II

The treatment of animals. – The difference between them and man. – Parental affection of a dog. – Brutality punished.

After breakfast, Mrs. Mason gave the children *Mrs. Trimmer's Fabulous Histories*; and the subject still turned on animals, and the wanton cruelty of those who treated them improperly. The little girls were eager to express their detestation, and requested that in future they might be allowed to feed the chickens. Mrs. Mason complied with their request; only one condition was annexed to the permission, that they did it regularly. When you wait for your food, you learn patience, she added, and you can mention your wants; but those helpless creatures cannot complain. The country people frequently say, – How can you treat a poor dumb beast ill; and a stress is very properly laid on the word dumb; – for dumb they appear to those who do not observe their looks and gestures; but God, who takes care of every thing, understands their language; and so did Caroline this morning, when she ran with such eagerness to re-place the nest which the thoughtless boy had stolen, heedless of the mother's agonizing cries!

Mary interrupted her, to ask, if insects and animals were not inferior to men; Certainly, answered Mrs. Mason; and men

are inferior to angels; yet we have reason to believe, that those exalted beings delight to do us good. You have heard in a book, which I seldom permit you to read, because you are not of an age to understand it, that angels, when they sang glory to God on high, wished for peace on earth, as a proof of the good will they felt towards men. And all the glad tidings that have been sent to men, angels have proclaimed: indeed, the word angel signifies a messenger. In order to please God, and our happiness depends upon pleasing him, we must do good. What we call virtue, may be thus explained: – we exercise every benevolent affection to enjoy comfort here, and to fit ourselves to be angels hereafter. And when we have acquired human virtues, we shall have a nobler employment in our Father's kingdom. But between angels and men a much greater resemblance subsists, than between men and the brute creation; because the two former seem capable of improvement.

The birds you saw to-day do not improve – or their improvement only tends to self-preservation; the first nest they make and the last are exactly the same; though in their flights they must see many others more beautiful if not more convenient, and, had they reason, they would probably shew something like individual taste in the form of their dwellings; but this is not the case. You saw the hen tear the down from her breast to make a nest for her eggs; you saw her beat the grain with her bill, and not swallow a bit, till the young were satisfied; and afterwards she covered them with her wings, and seemed perfectly happy,

while she watched over her charge; if any one approached, she was ready to defend them, at the hazard of her life: yet, a fortnight hence, you will see the same hen drive the fledged chickens from the corn, and forget the fondness that seemed to be stronger than the first impulse of nature.

Animals have not the affections which arise from reason, nor can they do good, or acquire virtue. Every affection, and impulse, which I have observed in them, are like our inferior emotions, which do not depend entirely on our will, but are involuntary; they seem to have been implanted to preserve the species, and make the individual grateful for actual kindness. If you caress and feed them, they will love you, as children do, without knowing why; but we neither see imagination nor wisdom in them; and, what principally exalts man, friendship and devotion, they seem incapable of forming the least idea of. Friendship is founded on knowledge and virtue, and these are human acquirements; and devotion is a preparation for eternity; because when we pray to God, we offer an affront to him, if we do not strive to imitate the perfections He displays every where for our imitation, that we may grow better and happier.

The children eagerly enquired in what manner they were to behave, to prove that they were superior to animals? The answer was short, – be tender-hearted; and let your superior endowments ward off the evils which they cannot foresee. It is only to animals that children *can* do good, men are their superiors. When I was a child, added their tender friend, I always made it my study

and delight, to feed all the dumb family that surrounded our house; and when I could be of use to any one of them I was happy. This employment humanized my heart, while, like wax, it took every impression; and Providence has since made me an instrument of good – I have been useful to my fellow-creatures. I, who never wantonly trod on an insect, or disregarded the plaint of the speechless beast, can now give bread to the hungry, physic to the sick, comfort to the afflicted, and, above all, am preparing you, who are to live for ever, to be fit for the society of angels, and good men made perfect. This world, I told you, was a road to a better – a preparation for it; if we suffer, we grow humbler and wiser: but animals have not this advantage, and man should not prevent their enjoying all the happiness of which they are capable.

A she-cat or dog have such strong parental affection, that if you take away their young, it almost kills them; some have actually died of grief when all have been taken away; though they do not seem to miss the greatest part.

A bitch had once all her litter stolen from her, and drowned in a neighbouring brook: she sought them out, and brought them one by one, laid them at the feet of her cruel master; – and looking wistfully at them for some time, in dumb anguish, turning her eyes on the destroyer, she expired!

I myself knew a man who had hardened his heart to such a degree, that he found pleasure in tormenting every creature whom he had any power over. I saw him let two guinea-pigs

roll down sloping tiles, to see if the fall would kill them. And were they killed? cried Caroline. Certainly; and it is well they were, or he would have found some other mode of torment. When he became a father, he not only neglected to educate his children, and set them a good example, but he taught them to be cruel while he tormented them: the consequence was, that they neglected him when he was old and feeble; and he died in a ditch.

You may now go and feed your birds, and tie some of the straggling flowers round the garden sticks. After dinner, if the weather continues fine, we will walk to the wood, and I will shew you the hole in the lime-stone mountain (a mountain whose bowels, as we call them, are lime-stones) in which poor crazy Robin and his dog lived.

CHAPTER III

The treatment of animals. – The story of crazy Robin. –
The man confined in the Bastille.

In the afternoon the children bounded over the short grass of the common, and walked under the shadow of the mountain till they came to a craggy part; where a stream broke out, and ran down the declivity, struggling with the huge stones which impeded its progress, and occasioned a noise that did not unpleasantly interrupt the solemn silence of the place. The brook was soon lost in a neighbouring wood, and the children turned their eyes to the broken side of the mountain, over which ivy grew in great profusion. Mrs. Mason pointed out a little cave, and desired them to sit down on some stumps of trees, whilst she related the promised story.

In yonder cave once lived a poor man, who generally went by the name of crazy Robin. In his youth he was very industrious, and married my father's dairy-maid; a girl deserving of such a good husband. For some time they continued to live very comfortably; their daily labour procured their daily bread; but Robin, finding it was likely he should have a large family, borrowed a trifle, to add to the small pittance which they had saved in service, and took a little farm in a neighbouring county. I was then a child.

Ten or twelve years after, I heard that a crazy man, who appeared very harmless, had piled by the side of the brook a great number of stones; he would wade into the river for them, followed by a cur dog, whom he would frequently call his Jacky, and even his Nancy; and then mumble to himself, – thou wilt not leave me – we will dwell with the owls in the ivy. – A number of owls had taken shelter in it. The stones which he waded for he carried to the mouth of the hole, and only just left room enough to creep in. Some of the neighbours at last recollected his face; and I sent to enquire what misfortune had reduced him to such a deplorable state.

The information I received from different persons, I will communicate to you in as few words as I can.

Several of his children died in their infancy; and, two years before he came to his native place, one misfortune had followed another till he had sunk under their accumulated weight. Through various accidents he was long in arrears to his landlord; who, seeing that he was an honest man, who endeavoured to bring up his family, did not distress him; but when his wife was lying-in of her last child, the landlord dying, his heir sent and seized the stock for the rent; and the person from whom he had borrowed some money, exasperated to see all gone, arresting him immediately, he was hurried to gaol, without being able to leave any money for his family. The poor woman could not see them starve, and trying to support her children before she had gained sufficient strength, she caught cold; and through neglect, and her

want of proper nourishment, her illness turned to a putrid fever; which two of the children caught from her, and died with her. The two who were left, Jacky and Nancy, went to their father, and took with them a cur dog, that had long shared their frugal meals.

The children begged in the day, and at night slept with their wretched father. Poverty and dirt soon robbed their cheeks of the roses which the country air made bloom with a peculiar freshness; so that they soon caught a jail fever, – and died. The poor father, who was now bereft of all his children, hung over their bed in speechless anguish; not a groan or a tear escaped from him, whilst he stood, two or three hours, in the same attitude, looking at the dead bodies of his little darlings. The dog licked his hands, and strove to attract his attention; but for awhile he seemed not to observe his caresses; when he did, he said, mournfully, thou wilt not leave me – and then he began to laugh. The bodies were removed; and he remained in an unsettled state, often frantic; at length the phrenzy subsided, and he grew melancholy and harmless. He was not then so closely watched; and one day he contrived to make his escape, the dog followed him, and came directly to his native village.

After I had received this account, I determined he should live in the place he had chosen, undisturbed. I sent some conveniences, all of which he rejected, except a mat; on which he sometimes slept – the dog always did. I tried to induce him to eat, but he constantly gave the dog whatever I sent him, and lived

on haws and blackberries, and every kind of trash. I used to call frequently on him; and he sometimes followed me to the house I now live in, and in winter he would come of his own accord, and take a crust of bread. He gathered water-cresses out of the pool, and would bring them to me, with nosegays of wild thyme, which he plucked from the sides of the mountain. I mentioned before, that the dog was a cur. It had, indeed, the bad trick of a cur, and would run barking after horses heels. One day, when his master was gathering water-cresses, the dog running after a young gentleman's horse, made it start, and almost threw the rider; who grew so angry, that though he knew it was the poor madman's dog, he levelled his gun at his head – shot him, – and instantly rode off. Robin ran to his dog, – he looked at his wounds, and not sensible that he was dead, called to him to follow him; but when he found that he could not, he took him to the pool, and washed off the blood before it began to clot, and then brought him home, and laid him on the mat.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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