

**FERGUS MORTON:
A STORY OF A
SCOTTISH BOY**

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Fergus Morton: A Story of a Scottish Boy by J. R. Macduff

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SANDERS MORTON AT WORK IN HIS SMITHY.

FERGUS MORTON.

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A STORY OF A SCOTTISH BOY.

BY

J. R. MACDUFF, D.D.

"Footsteps, that perchance another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
Some forlorn and shipwreck'd brother
Seeing, may take heart again."

LONDON:

JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.

MDCCLXIX.

FERGUS MORTON.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was nothing conspicuous about the cottage where **FERGUS MMORTON**, the little hero of my tale, was born. It was in a retired part of Scotland, close by a village green, with a rivulet flowing through it. Large elms, topped with rook's nests, were clustered around; and among these picturesque and gnarled trees, at a turn of the road, was a blacksmith's shop, or "smithy," belonging to Fergus's father. No man in all the village was more esteemed than Sanders Morton;—familiarily known by the

name of "The Blacksmith." He was a sort of little oracle in the place. He was, in the best sense, the friend of his poorer neighbours; both able and willing to tender, asked or unasked, a sound advice. Nor was he less respected by the rich: the "lairds" around knew him to be an unrivalled judge of a horse; the farmers of the neighbourhood invariably deferred to his skill in the treatment of all animal ailments; in the great cattle markets, held twice a-year, Sanders, in the eyes of both buyer and seller, was the important man of the hour and the district. Yet, for all this, he was a hard worker, honest and industrious, sober and frugal; while the ringing sound of his big hammer on the anvil shewed what stuff his brawny arm was made of. He would almost seem to have sat for his portrait when the poet wrote these words:—

"His brow is wet with honest sweat;
He earns whate'er he can;
And looks the whole world in the face—
For he owes not any man.

Week in, week out, from morn to night,
You can hear his bellows blow;
You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,
With measured beat and slow.

And children coming home from school
Look in at the open door:
They love to see the flaming forge,
And to hear the bellows roar."

Among that crowd none was more regular or interested than young Fergus; and, perhaps, as was natural, he had some privileges accorded to him which were denied to his companions,—such as taking a turn in blowing the bellows, or tethering the horses by the rough iron rings as they came in to be shod, or getting a ride of a few paces up and down in front of the smithy door, on the animals that had been kept longer waiting until his father was ready. Rover used to look knowingly on, and wag his tail approvingly at his young master's performances,—for you must know that the Morton's dog was, in his own way, as often dogs are, a village character also. He was a beautiful black sleek creature,—a cross between a

collie and a setter, uniting the sagacity of the one with the affection of the other; with russet-brown on his cheeks and paws, and eyes that looked kindly on everybody that was kind to him, and specially so on Fergus;—for though the blacksmith, when he came in from his work, was often tired and unable to humour his humble companion in his frolics, Fergus's lessons were never so engrossing as to prevent him exchanging a word with his four-footed friend.

Fergus had one sister—Elsie—older than himself, of whom he was very fond; and well he might, for she had been everything to him since their mother had been taken away in early childhood. But as she was the great joy of his young life, so was she the occasion of his first, and, in some respects, his deepest sorrow. For Elsie fell ill. She tried for months to hide her illness from her father and Fergus; but the cough gradually increased, her hands became thinner and her cheeks paler, and the pain in her side more acute.

“Wisht, wisht!” she would say to Fergus as she saw him beginning to look concerned and anxious, “it’s naething at a’; when the flowers begin to bloom, and the birds to sing, I will be all weel again, and help you and father to delve the yard and rake the walks.” But, alas! it was a vain hope. It soon became manifest to all, save to Elsie herself, that she was not to be long for this world. Her father’s quick eye discerned, sooner than most, the sad reality. Leaving the horses standing by the smithy, he would, every now and then, run along with his bare arms, and his leathern apron tucked up at his side, to ask how she was keeping, and then return—always with a heavier heart—to resume his work. One thing alone comforted him,—that Elsie was well prepared for whatever the will of God might be. She had been taught early to love Jesus as her Saviour. To no one in the village had the Sunday school proved a more signal blessing; and although it was mysterious for so young a life to be so early taken, yet, but for the leaving of