
THE TWINS.

THE Kirk of Auchindown stands, with its Burial-ground, on a little green hill, surrounded by an irregular and straggling village, or rather about an hundred hamlets clustering round it, with their fields and gardens. A few of these gardens come close up to the church-yard wall, and in Spring-time, many of the fruit-trees hang rich and beautiful over the adjacent graves. The voices and the laughter of the children at play on the green before the parish-school, or their composed murmur when at their various lessons together in the room, may be distinctly heard all over the burial-ground,—so may the song of the maidens going to the well ;—while all around, the singing of birds is thick and hurried ; and a small rivulet, as if brought there to be an emblem of passing time, glides away beneath the mossy wall, murmuring continually a dreamlike tune around the dwellings of the dead.

In the quiet of the evening, after the Elder's Funeral, my venerable friend and father took me with him into the church-yard. We walked to the eastern cor-

ner, where, as we approached, I saw a Monument standing almost by itself, and even at that distance, appearing to be of a somewhat different character from any other over all the burial-ground. And now we stood close to, and before it.

It was a low Monument, of the purest white marble, simple, but perfectly elegant and graceful withal, and upon its unadorned slab lay the sculptured images of two Children asleep in each other's arms. All round it was a small piece of greenest ground, without the protection of any rail, but obviously belonging to the Monument. It shone, without offending them, among the simpler or ruder burial beds round about it, and although the costliness of the materials, the affecting beauty of the design, and the delicacy of its execution, all showed that there slept the offspring neither of the poor nor low in life, yet so meekly and sadly did it lift up its unstained little walls, and so well did its unusual elegance meet and blend with the character of the common tombs, that no heart could see it without sympathy, and without owning that it was a pathetic ornament of a place filled with the ruder memorials of the very humblest dead.

“ There lie two of the sweetest Children,” said the old Man, “ that ever delighted a mother's soul—two English boys—scions of a noble stem. They were of a decayed family of high lineage ; and had they died in their own country a hundred years ago, they would

have been let down into a vault with all the pomp of religion. Methinks, fair flowers, they are now sleeping as meetly here.

“ Six years ago I was an old man, and wished to have silence and stillness in my house, that my communion with Him before whom I expected every day to be called might be undisturbed. Accordingly my Manse, that used to ring with boyish glee, was now quiet; when a Lady, elegant, graceful, beautiful, young, and a widow, came to my dwelling, and her soft, sweet, silver voice told me that she was from England. She was the relict of an officer slain in war, and having heard a dear friend of her husband's, who had lived in my house, speak of his happy and innocent time here, she earnestly requested me to receive beneath my roof her two sons. She herself lived with the bed-ridden mother of her dead husband; and anxious for the growing minds of her boys, she sought to commit them for a short time to my care. They and their mother soon won an old man's heart, and I could say nothing in opposition to her request but that I was upwards of threescore and ten years. But I am living still—and that is their Monument.”

We sat down, at these words, on the sloping headstone of a grave just opposite to this little beautiful structure, and, without entreaty, and as if to bring back upon his heart the delight of old tender remembrances, the venerable Man continued fervently thus to speak.

“ The Lady left them with me in the Manse—surely the two most beautiful and engaging creatures that ever died in youth. They were Twins. Like were they unto each other, as two bright-plumaged doves of one colour, or two flowers with the same blossom and the same leaves. They were dressed alike, and whatever they wore, in that did they seem more especially beautiful. Their hair was the same, a bright auburn—their voices were as one—so that the Twins were inseparable in my love, whether I beheld them, or my dim eyes were closed. From the first hour they were left alone with me, and without their mother, in the Manse, did I begin to love them, nor were they slow in returning an old man’s affection. They stole up to my side, and submitted their smooth, glossy, leaning heads to my withered and trembling hand, nor for a while could I tell, as the sweet beings came gliding gladsomely near me, which was Edward and which was Henry; and often did they, in loving playfulness, try to deceive my loving heart. But they could not defraud each other of my tenderness; for whatever the one received, that was ready to be bestowed upon the other. To love the one more than the other was impossible.

“ Sweet creatures! it was not long before I learned to distinguish them. That which seemed to me, at first, so perfectly the same, soon unfolded itself out into many delightful varieties, and then I wondered how I ever could have mistaken them for one another.

Different shadows played upon their hair ; that of the one being silky and smooth, and of the other slightly curled at the edges, and clustering thickly when he flung his locks back in playfulness or joy. His eyes, though of a hazle-hue like that of his brother, were considerably lighter, and a smile seemed native there ; while those of the other seemed almost dark, and fitter for the mist of tears. Dimples marked the cheeks of the one, but those of the other were paler and smooth. Their voices too, when I listened to them and knew their character, had a faint fluctuating difference of inflection and tone—like the same instrument blown upon with a somewhat stronger or weaker breath. Their very laugh grew to be different unto my ear—that of the one freer and more frequent, that of the other mild in its utmost glee. And they had not been many days in the Manse, before I knew in a moment, dim as my eyes had long been, the soft, timid, stealing step of Edward, from the dancing and fearless motion of Henry Howard.”

Here the old man paused, not as it seemed from any fatigue in speaking so long, but as if to indulge more profoundly in his remembrance of the children whom he had so tenderly loved. He fixed his dim eyes on their sculptured images with as fond an expression, as if they had been alive and had lain down there to sleep—and when, without looking on me whom he felt to have been listening with quiet attention, he again began to

speak, it was partly to tell me the tale of these fair sleepers, and partly to give vent to his loving grief.

“ All strangers, even many who thought they knew them well, were pleasantly perplexed with the faces and figures of the bright English Twins. The poor beggars, as they went their rounds, blessed them, without knowing whether it was Edward or Henry that had bestowed his alms. The mother of the cottage children with whom they played confused their images in her loving heart, as she named them in her prayers. When only one was present, it gave a start of strange delight to them who did not know the Twins, to see another creature so beautifully the same come gliding in upon them, and join his brother in a share of their suddenly bestowed affection.

“ They soon came to love, with all their hearts, the place wherein they had their new habitation. Not even in their own merry England had their young eyes ever seen brighter green fields,—trees more umbrageous—or, perhaps, even rural gardens more flowery and blossoming, than those of this Scottish village. They had lived, indeed, mostly in a town; and, in the midst of the freshness and balminess of the country, they became happier and more gleesome—it was said by many, even more beautiful. The affectionate creatures did not forget their mother. Alternately did they write to her every week—and every week did one or other receive from her a letter, in which the sweetest maternal feelings were traced in

small delicate lines, that bespoke the hand of an accomplished lady. Their education had not been neglected; and they learnt every thing they were taught with a surprising quickness and docility—alike amiable and intelligent. Morning and evening, too, did they kneel down with clasped hands—these lovely Twins—even at my feet, and resting on my knees; and melodiously did they murmur together the hymns which their mother had taught them, and passages selected from the Scriptures,—many of which are in the affecting, beautiful, and sublime ritual of the English Church. And always, the last thing they did, before going to sleep in each other's arms, was to look at their mother's picture, and to kiss it with fond kisses, and many an endearing name."

Just then, two birds alighted softly on the white marble Monument, and began to trim their plumes. They were doves from their nest in the belfry of the spire, from which a low, deep, plaintive murmuring was now heard to come, deepening the profound silence of the burial-ground. The two bright birds walked about for a few minutes round the images of the children, or stood quietly at their feet; and then, clapping their wings, flew up and disappeared. The incident, though, at any other time, common and uninteresting, had a strange effect upon my heart now, and seemed dimly emblematic of the innocence and beauty of the inhabitants of that tomb, and of the flight of their sinless souls to heaven.

“ One evening in early Autumn, (they had been with me from the middle of May,) Edward, the elder, complained, on going to bed, of a sore throat, and I proposed that his brother should sleep in another bed. I saw them myself, accordingly, in separate places of repose. But on going, about an hour afterwards, into their room, there I found them locked, as usual, in each other's arms—face to face—and their innocent breath mingling from lips that nearly touched. I could not find heart to separate them, nor could I have done so, without awaking Edward. His cheeks were red and flushed, and his sleep broken and full of starts. Early in the morning I was at their bed-side. Henry was lying apart from his brother, looking at him with a tearful face, and his little arm laid so as to touch his bosom. Edward was unable to rise—his throat was painful, his pulse high, and his heart sick. Before evening he became slightly delirious, and his illness was evidently a fever of a dangerous and malignant kind. He was, I told you, a bold and gladsome child, when not at his tasks, dancing and singing almost every hour; but the fever quickly subdued his spirit, the shivering fits made him weep and wail, and rueful, indeed, was the change which a single night and day had brought forth.

“ His brother seemed to be afraid more than children usually are of sickness, which they are always slow to link with the thought of death. But he told me, weeping, that his eldest brother had died of a fe-

ver, and that his mother was always alarmed about that disease. "Did I think," asked he, with wild eyes, and a palpitating heart, "did I think that Edward was going to die?" I looked at the affectionate child, and taking him to my bosom, I felt that his own blood was beating but too quickly, and that fatal had been that night's sleeping embrace in his brother's bosom. The fever had tainted his sweet veins also—and I had soon to lay him shivering on his bed. In another day he too was delirious—and too plainly chasing his brother into the grave.

"Never in the purest hours of their healthful happiness had their innocent natures seemed to me more beautiful than now in their delirium. As it increased, all vague fears of dying left their souls, and they kept talking as if to each other of every thing here or in England that was pleasant and interesting. Now and then they murmured the names of persons of whom I had not formerly heard them speak—friends who had been kind to them before I had known of their existence, and servants in their mother's or their father's household. Of their mother they spoke to themselves, though necessarily kept apart, almost in the very same words, expecting a visit from her at the Manse, and then putting out their little hands to embrace her. All their innocent plays were acted over and over again on the bed of death. They were looking into the nests of the little singing birds, which they never injured, in the hedgerows and the woods. And the

last intelligible words that I heard Edward utter were these—"Let us go, brother, to the church-yard, and lie down on the daisies among the little green mounds!"

"They both died within an hour of each other. I lifted up Henry, when I saw he too was dead, and laid him down beside his brother. There lay the Twins, and had their mother at that hour come into the room, she would have been thankful to see that sight, for she would have thought that her children were in a calm and refreshing sleep!"

My eyes were fixed upon the sculptured images of the dead—lying side by side, with their faces up to heaven, their little hands folded as in prayer upon their bosoms, and their eyelids closed. The old man drew a sigh almost like a sob, and wept. They had been intrusted to his care—they had come smiling from another land—for one summer they were happy—and then disappeared, like the other fading flowers, from the earth. I wished that the old man would cease his touching narrative—both for his sake and my own. So I rose, and walked up quite close to the Monument, inspecting the spirit of its design, and marking the finish of its execution. But he called me to him, and requesting me to resume my seat beside him on the gravestone, he thus continued.

"I had written to their mother in England that her children were in extreme danger, but it was not possible that she could arrive in time to see them die, not even to see them buried. Decay was fast preying upon

them, and the beauty of death was beginning to disappear. So we could not wait the arrival of their mother, and their grave was made. Even the old grey-headed sexton wept, for in this case of mortality there was something to break in upon the ordinary tenor of his thoughts, and to stir up in his heart feelings that he could not have known existed there. There was sadness indeed over all the parish for the fair English Twins, who had come to live in the Manse after all the other boys had left it, and who, as they were the last, so were they the loveliest of all my flock. The very sound or accent of their southern voices, so pretty and engaging to our ears in the simplicity of childhood; had won many a heart, and touched, too, the imaginations of many with a new delight; and therefore, on the morning when they were buried, it may be said there was here a fast-day of grief.

“ The dead children were English—in England had all their ancestors been born; and I knew, from the little I had seen of the mother, that though she had brought her mind to confide her children to the care of a Scottish Minister in their tender infancy, she was attached truly and deeply to the ordinances of her own Church. I felt that it would be accordant with her feelings, and that afterwards she would have satisfaction in the thought, that they should be buried according to the form of the English funeral-service. I communicated this wish to an Episcopalian Clergyman in the City, and he came to my house. He arranged

the funeral, as far as possible in the circumstances, according to that service ; and although, no doubt, there was a feeling of curiosity mingled in many minds with the tenderness and awe which that touching and solemn ceremonial awakened, yet it was witnessed, not only without any feelings of repugnance or scorn, but, I may in truth say, with a rational sympathy, and with all the devout emotions embodied in language so scriptural and true to nature.

“ The bier was carried slowly aloft upon men’s shoulders, towards the church-yard gate. I myself walked at their little heads. Some of the neighbouring gentry—my own domestics—a few neighbours—and some of the school-children, formed the procession. The latter, walking before the coffin, continued singing a funeral psalm all the way till we reached the church-yard gate. It was a still gentle autumnal day, and now and then a withered leaf came rustling across the path of the weeping choristers. To us, to whom that dirge-like strain was new, all seemed like a pensive, and mournful, and holy dream.

“ The Clergyman met the bier at the gate, and preceded it into the Kirk. It was then laid down—and while all knelt—I keeping my place at the heads of the sweet boys—he read, beautifully, affectingly, and solemnly,—a portion of the funeral service. The children had been beloved and admired, while alive, as the English Twins, and so had they always been called ; and that feeling of their having belonged, as it

were, to another country, not only justified but made pathetic to all now assembled upon their knees, the ritual employed by that Church to which they, and their parents, and all their ancestors, had belonged. A sighing—and a sobbing too, was heard over the silence of my Kirk, when the Clergyman repeated these words, “As soon as thou scatterest them, they are even as a sleep, and fade away suddenly like the grass.

“In the morning it is green and groweth up: but in the evening it is cut down, dried up, and withered.”

While the old man was thus describing their burial, the clock in the steeple struck, and he paused a moment at the solemn sound. Soon as it had slowly told the hour of advancing evening, he arose from the gravestone, as if his mind sought a relief from the weight of tenderness, in a change of bodily position. We stood together facing the little Monument—and his narrative was soon brought to a close.

“We were now all collected together round the grave. The silence of yesterday, at the Elder’s Funeral, was it not felt by you to be agreeable to all our natural feelings? So were the words which were now spoken over these Children. The whole ceremony was different, but it touched the very same feelings in our hearts. It lent an expression, to what, in that other case, was willing to be silent. There was a sweet, a sad, and a mournful consistency in the

ritual of death, from the moment we receded from the door of the Manse, accompanied by the music of that dirge sung by the clear tremulous voices of the young and innocent, till we entered the Kirk with the coffin to the sound of the priest's chaunted verses from Job and St John, during the time when we knelt round the dead children in the House of God, also during our procession thence to the grave-side, still attended with chaunting, or reciting, or responding voices; and, finally, at the moment of dropping of a piece of earth upon the coffin, (it was from my own hand,) while the priest said, "We commit their bodies to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Next day their Mother arrived at the Manse. She knew, before she came, that her children were dead and buried. It is true that she wept; and at the first sight of their grave, for they both lay in one coffin, her grief was passionate and bitter. But that fit soon passed away. Her tears were tears of pity for them, but as for herself, she hoped that she was soon to see them in Heaven. Her face pale, yet flushed—her eyes hollow, yet bright, and a general languor and lassitude over her whole frame, all told that she was in the first stage of a consumption. This she knew and was happy. But other duties called her back to England, for the short remainder of her life. She herself drew the design of that Monument with her

own hand, and left it with me when she went away. I soon heard of her death. Her husband lies buried near Grenada, in Spain; she lies in the chancel of the Cathedral of Salisbury, in England; and there sleep her Twins in the little burial-ground of Auchindown, a Scottish Parish.