

## CONSUMPTION.

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THE Moss-Roses are still clustered in their undecaying splendour above the Porch of Calder-Cottage; the bees are murmuring in their joy around the Hive on its green sward rich with its white and purple clover; the turtle doves are cooing on the roof, with plumage brightening in the sunshine; while over all is shed a dim and tender shadow from the embowering Sycamore, beneath whose shelter was built, many long years ago, the little humble Edifice. In its low simplicity it might be the dwelling of the poor; but the heart feels something in its quiet loveliness that breathes of the spirit of cultivated life. A finer character of beauty pervades the still seclusion, than the hand of labour ever shed over its dwelling in the gratitude of its Sabbath-hours; all around seems ministering to the joy, and not to the necessities of existence; and as the eye dwells on the gorgeous ornaments which sun, and air, and dew have showered in profusion over the blooming walls, the mind cannot but think of some delicate and gentle spirit retired from

the world it had adorned, and enjoying in the twilight of life the sweetness and serenity of Nature.

Such were its inmates a few short months ago. The sound of music was heard far down the romantic banks of the Calder, when, in the silence of evening, the harp was touched within these humble walls, or there arose a mingled voice as of spirits hymning through the woods. But the strings of the harp are now silent, and the young lips that sung those heavenly anthems are covered with the dust.

The Lady who lived there in her widowhood was sprung of gentle blood; and none who had but for a moment looked on her pale countenance, and her figure majestic even under the burden of pain, could ever again forget that image, at once so solemn and so beautiful. Although no deep lines disturbed the meek expression of that fading face, and something that almost seemed a smile still shone over her placid features, yet had that Lady undergone in her day hardships, and troubles, and calamities that might have broken the heart, and laid low the head of manhood in its sternest pride. She had been with her husband in famine, battle, and shipwreck. When his mortal wound came, she sat by his bed-side—her hand closed his eyes and wrought his shroud,—and she was able to gaze with a stedfast eye on all the troops marching with reversed arms, and with slow step, to melancholy music, when the whole army was drawn up at his funeral on the field of battle. Perhaps, then, she wish-

ed to die. But two children were at her knees, and another at her bosom ; and on her return to her native country, she found heart to walk through the very scenes where she had been most blest before these infants were born, and to live in the very dwelling to which he who was now buried had brought her a young and happy bride. Such had been his last request—and seventeen years of resignation and peace had now passed over the head of the widow—whose soul was with her husband at morning and at evening prayers—during hours of the day when there were many present—and during hours of the night when there were none but the eye of God to witness her uncomplaining melancholy. Her grief was calm, but it was constant—it repined not, but it wasted away—and though all called her happy, all knew that her life was frail, and that one so sad and sorrowful even in her happiness was not destined by God for old age. Yet for her none felt pity—a higher feeling arose in every heart from the resignation so perfectly expressed in every motion, look, and tone—and beautiful as she was on earth, there came across the souls of all who beheld her a thought of one yet more beautiful in heaven.

Her three Daughters, although their health had always been delicate, were well, cheerful, and happy ; but some said, that whenever they were met walking alone, a solemn, if not a mournful expression was on their countenances ; and whether it was so or not, they

certainly shunned society rather than sought it, and seldom partook of the innocent amusements natural to youth, and to which youth lends so much grace and attraction. No one ever saw any of them unamiable, or averse from the gladness of others ; but a shade of sadness was now perceptible over all their demeanour, and they seemed bound together by some tie even more strict than that of sisterly affection. The truth was, that they felt God had given them but a short life, and that when the bier of one was carried into the church-yard, that of the other would not be long of following it to the place of rest.

Their Mother died first, and her death had been long foreseen by them ; for they, who spoke together of their own deaths, were not likely to deceive themselves with respect to that of one so dear to them all. She was ready and willing to die ; but tears were on her cheek only a few hours before her decease, for the sake of her three daughters, left to themselves, and to drop away, as she well knew, one after the other, in that fatal disease which they inherited from their father. Her death was peaceful—almost happy—but, resigned as she was, it could not but be afflicting to her parting spirit to see those three beautiful spectres gliding round her bed-side, with countenances and persons that plainly told they were fast hastening on to the tomb.

The funeral of the Mother was conducted as it deserved to be—for humble as she was in heart, yet she had

been highly born ; and many attended her body to the grave who had almost forgotten her when alive in her simple retirement. But these were worldly mourners, who laid aside their sorrow with their suits of sable—many who had no right to walk near her coffin felt they had a right to weep over her grave, and for many Sabbaths after her burial, groupes collected beside the mound, and while many of them could not but weep, none left it without a sigh and a blessing. When her three daughters, after the intermission of a few Sabbaths, were again seen walking, arm in arm, into the church, and taking their seats in their own pew, the whole congregation may be said to have regarded the Orphans with a compassion, which was heightened into an emotion at once overcoming and consoling, when it was visible to all who looked upon them, that ere long they would be lying side by side near their Mother's grave.

After her death, the three Orphans were seldomer seen than before ; and, pale as their sweet faces had seemed when they used to dress in white, they seemed even paler now contrasted with their black mourning garments. They received the visits of their few dear friends with warmest gratitude, and those of ordinary condolment with a placid content ; they did not appear wearied of this world, but resigned to leave it ; smiles and the pressure of affectionate hands were still dear to them ; and, if they kept themselves apart from society, it was not because they could not sympathize

with its hilarity, its amusements, and its mirth, but because they were warned by feelings close upon their brain and heart, that they were doomed soon to lay their heads down into the dust. Some visitors, on first entering their parlour, in which every thing was still as elegantly and gracefully arranged as ever, wondered why the fair Sisters should so seldom be seen out of their own dwelling; but not one, even the most thoughtless and unfeeling, ever left them without far different thoughts, or without a sorrowful conviction that they were passing, in perfect resignation, the remainder of their life, which, in their own hearts, they knew to be small. So, week after week, visits of idle ceremony were discontinued; and none now came to Calder-Cottage except those who had been dear to their dead Mother, and were dear, even for that reason, had there been no other, to the dying Orphans.

They sat in their beauty within the shadow of death. But happiness was not therefore excluded from Calder-Cottage. It was even a sublime satisfaction to know that God was to call them away from their mortal being unsevered; and that while they all three knelt in prayer, it was not for the sake of one only who was to leave the survivors in tears, but for themselves that they were mutually beseeching God, that he would be pleased to smooth the path by which they were walking hand in hand to the grave. When the sun shone, they still continued to wander along the shaded banks of their beloved Calder, and admire its quiet

junction with the wide-flowing Clyde. They did not neglect their flower-garden, although they well knew that their eyes were not to be gladdened by the blossoms of another Spring. They strewed, as before, crumbs for the small birds that had built their nests among the roses and honeysuckles on the wall of their cottage. They kept the weeds from overgrowing the walks that were soon to be trodden by their feet no more ; and they did not turn their eyes away from the shooting flowers which they knew took another spring to bring them to maturity, and would be disclosing their fragrant beauty in the sunshine that shone on their own graves. Nor did their higher cares lose any of the interest or the charm which they had possessed during their years of health and hope. The old people whom their charity supported were received with as kind smiles as ever, when they came to receive their weekly dole. The children whom they clothed and sent to school met with the same sweet voices as before, when on the Saturday evenings they visited the ladies of Calder-Cottage ; and the innocent mirth of all about the house, the garden, the fields, or the adjacent huts, seemed to be pleasant to their ears, when stealing unexpectedly upon them from happy persons engrossed with their own joys, and unaware that the sound of their pastimes had reached those whose own earthly enjoyments were so near a close.

These were the last lingering shadows and sounds and odours of life ; and the time had not yet come

upon either of these Orphans when they could not be enjoyed. But they had other comforts ; and if it had been ever most delightful to them to read and study the word of God, when they let fall upon the holy page eyes bright with the dewy light of health yet undecaying, it was now more than delightful—it was blessed—to peruse it now together, when they had to give the Bible by turns into each other's hands, that their eye-sight might not get dim, nor their voice falter, which would have been, had the same dying Christian read aloud one chapter to the end. When the old Minister visited them, he found them always cheerful and composed—during his stay they were even joyful in their resignation ; and at parting, if tears were ever shed, it was by the aged for the young who wept not for themselves, except when they thought how that benign Old Man had stood by their mother's death-bed, and when she had lost her utterance, let her spirit ascend upon his prayers to heaven.

Caroline was the first to die. Her character, unlike that of both her sisters, had been distinguished by great spirit and vivacity, and when they were present, had always diffused something of its own glad light over the serene composure of the one, and the melancholy stillness of the other, without seeming ever to be inconsistent with them ; nor did her natural and irrepresible buoyancy altogether forsake her even to the very last. With her the disease assumed its most beautiful show. Her light blue eyes sparkled with astonishing



brilliancy—her cheeks, that had always hitherto been pale, glowed with a rose-like lustre—although she knew that she was dying, and strove to subdue her soul down to her near fate, yet, in spite of herself, the strange fire that glowed in the embers of her life, kindled it often into a kind of airy gladness, so that a stranger would have thought her one on whom opening existence was just revealing the treasures of its joy, and who was eager to unfold her wings, and sail on into the calm and sunny future. Her soul, till within a few days of her death, was gay in the exhilaration of disease; and the very night before she died, she touched the harp with a playful hand, and warbled, as long as her strength would permit, a few bars of a romantic tune. No one was with her when she died, for she had risen earlier than her sisters, and was found by them, when they came down to the parlour, leaning back with a smiling face, on the sofa, with a few lilies in her hand, and never more to have her head lifted up in life.

The youngest had gone first, and she was to be followed by Emma the next in age. Emma, although so like her sister who was now dead, that they had always been thought by strangers to be Twins, had a character altogether different. Her thoughts and feelings ran in a deeper channel; nature had endowed her with extraordinary talents, and whatever she attempted, serious acquisition or light accomplishment, in that she easily excelled. Few, indeed, is the number of

women that are eminently distinguished among their sex, and leave names to be enrolled in the lists of fame. Some accidental circumstances of life or death have favoured those few ; and their sentiments, thoughts, feelings, fancies, and opinions, retain a permanent existence. But how many sink into the grave in all their personal beauty, and all their mental charms, and are heard of no more ! Of them no bright thoughts are recorded, no touching emotions, no wild imaginations. All their fine and true perceptions, all their instinctive knowledge of the human soul, and all their pure speculation on the mystery of human life, vanish for ever and aye with the parting breath. A fair, amiable, intelligent young maiden has died and is buried. That is all. And her grave lies in its unvisited rest. Such an one was Emma Beatoun. Her mother, her sisters, and a few dear friends, knew what treasures of thought were in her soul—what gleams of genius—and what light of unpretending wisdom. But she carried up her pure and high thoughts with her to heaven ; nor did any of them survive her on earth, but a few fragments of hymns set by herself to plaintive music, which no voice but her own, so deep and yet so sweet, so mellow yet so mournful, could ever have fitly sung.

The sufferings of this Sister were heavy indeed, and she at last prayed to be relieved. Constant sickness, interrupted only by fits of racking pain, kept the fair Shadow for the last weeks of her life to bed, and nothing seemed to disturb her so much, as the inces-

sant care of her dying sister, who seemed to forget her own approaching doom in the tenderest ministrations of love. Emma's religious thoughts had long been of an almost dark and awful character, and she was possessed by a deep sense of her own utter unworthiness in the sight of God. It was feared, that as her end drew near, and her mind was weakened by continual suffering, her last hours might be visited with visions too trying and terrible; but the reverse was the case, and it seemed as if God, to reward a life of meekness, humility, and wisdom, removed all fear from her soul, and showed her the loving, rather than the awful mysteries of her Redeemer. On her dead face there sat a smile, just as pleasant and serene as that which had lighted the countenance of Caroline, when she fell asleep for ever with the lilies in her hand. The old Nurse, who had been with them since their infancy, alone observed that she had expired, for there had been no sigh, and the pale emaciated fingers moved not as they lay clasped together across her breast.

Louisa, the eldest, was now left alone, and although her health had always been the most delicate, there seemed, from some of the symptoms, a slight hope that she might yet recover. That fatal hectic flush did not stain her cheeks; and her pulse, although very faint, had not the irregularity of alarming fever. But there are secrets known but to the dying themselves; and all the encouraging kindness of friends was re-

ceived by her as sweet proofs of affection, but never once touched her heart with hope. The disease of which both her sisters had died was in the blood of her father's family, and she never rose up from her bed, or her couch, or the grey osier-seat in the sunny garden, without feeling a deathlike lassitude that could not long endure. Indeed she yearned for the grave; and hers was a weariness that could only find entire relief in the perfect stillness of that narrow house.

Had Louisa not felt death within her bosom, there were circumstances that could not have failed to make her desire life, even after her Mother and Sisters had been taken away. For she had been betrothed, for a year past, to one who would have made her happy. He received an account of the alarming state of the Sisters at Pisa, whither he had gone for the establishment of his own health, and he instantly hurried home to Scotland. Caroline and Emma were in their graves; but he had the mournful satisfaction to be with his own Louisa in her last days. Much did he, at first, press her to go to Italy, as a faint and forlorn hope; but he soon desisted from such vain persuasions. "The thought is sweet to lay our bones within the bosom of our native soil. The verdure and the flowers I loved will brighten around my grave—the same trees whose pleasant murmurs cheered my living ear will hang their cool shadows over my dust, and the eyes that met mine in the light of affection will shed tears over the sod that covers me, keeping

my memory green within their spirits!" He who had been her lover—but was now the friend and brother of her soul, had nothing to say in reply to these natural sentiments. "After all, they are but fancies—Henry—but they cling to the heart from which they sprung—and to be buried in the sweet church-yard of Blantyre is now a thought most pleasant to my soul."

In dry summer weather, a clear rivulet imperceptibly shrinks away from its sandy bed, till on some morning we miss the gleam and the murmur altogether—and find the little channel dry. Just in this way was Louisa wasting—and so was her life pure and beautiful to the last. The day before she died, she requested in a voice that could not be denied, that her Brother would take her into the church-yard, that she might see the graves of her Mother and Sisters all lying together, and the spot whose daisies were soon to be disturbed. She was carried thither in the sunshine, on her sick chair, for the distance was only a very few hundred yards, and her attendants having withdrawn, she surveyed the graves with a beaming countenance, in presence of her weeping Friend. "Methinks," said she, "I hear a hymn—and children singing in the church! No—no—it is only the remembered sound of the psalm I heard the last Sabbath I had strength to go there. Oh! sweet was it now as the reality itself!" He who was to have been her Husband was wholly overcome, and hid his face in despair. "I go—my beloved—to that holy

place where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage—but we shall meet there, purified from every earthly stain. Dry up your tears and weep no more. Kiss—Oh kiss me once before I die!” He stooped down, and she had just strength to put her arms round his neck, when, with a long sigh,—she expired.