

they devoted their whole attention to their education; and had the comfort to find in their minds, so rich a soil, that every thing prospered which was planted in them: no useful knowledge was omitted, no external accomplishment neglected.

Frances and Isabella were now arrived at the age of twenty five. The amiableness of their characters, their enlarged understandings, and the gracefulness of their persons, won the admiration and esteem of all who approached them. They had, from similitude of manners, and sentiment, contracted such a rare affection for each other, that it seemed as if Nature, by forming them together in the womb, had prepared them for that extraordinary union, which was to distinguish their lives, and for those effusions of elevated friendship, which the loss of their exemplary mother was one day to call forth. Nor was this event very remote; Lady Margaret was seized by a sudden illness, which, in a few days, carried her off, and desolated one of the happiest families in the world.

It would be difficult to describe the sounds of woe, which, on this occasion, echoed through all the mansion, or the sighs of the disconsolate poor, under the windows. The grief of St. Clair, after the many years of uninterrupted happiness that he had enjoyed with Lady Margaret, in its first attack, almost overpowered his reason; while Frances and Isabella had the weight of a father's sorrow added to their own; which compelled them to smother their feelings, great as they were, and to assume a fortitude their hearts disavowed.

Lovely mourners! more lovely in your tears! Fancy pictures you before me, bathed in filial sorrow, standing by and supporting your distracted parent, striving in vain to tear him from the coffin, which he will not suffer his servants to close, still demanding in wild utterance, again, and again, one last, last look!

Heavens! how severe a distress! If my reader hath been in a situation, to ask for a last look of what is most dear to him, and what he is going to be deprived of forever, he alone can best judge how much that bosom agonizes, that urges the request!

Though St. Clair called in aid all his philosophy, to support himself under the loss of his beloved Lady Margaret, yet he was worn, by a silent sorrow, which had so visible an effect on his health, as to menace his life; and which, in about a year, put an end to it.

In this mournful interval, the greatest comfort his dejected daughters received, was, from the frequent visits of their uncle, John de St. Clair, who was at that

time Abbot of the monastery of St. Augustine, in Canterbury; of which place there are, at this day, such noble remains existing. He was the younger brother of Geoffry, though there was but the difference of a year between them; and was reputed to be a man of so much learning and virtue, that St. Clair, by his will, recommended his children to his care and protection; bequeathing to each of them, a very large inheritance.

The manner in which Frances had been brought up, added to her natural turn of mind, and the example of a mother she so much revered, determined her to a life of religious retirement; and a great convent of Benedictine Nuns, not very distant from Feverham, happening, a few months after, to lose their principal (who was always one of a considerable family) the Abbot of St. Augustine, perceiving her fixed in her scheme of life, procured her to be named the Lady Abbess of it.

Isabella, who had never as yet been separated from her sister, would, on this occasion, most willingly have taken the veil. 'The same roof,' says she, 'hath ever hitherto covered us, the same have been our wishes, the same our pursuits; the grave hath divided us from those, who taught us the amiableness of friendship, and shall alone divide us from one another!'

The Abbot was much hurt by this declaration of his niece. He desired her to banish from her thought, such a resolution; and failed not to intimate to her, that Frances, having devoted herself to the cloyster, she remained the only support of the family of St. Clair; that her virtues should rather embellish society, than be lost within the walls of a monastery; and wished she would, by accepting some alliance of suitable rank and fortune, rather permit those accomplishments to be seen by the world, which she sought to hide in oblivion.

Frances, on her part, however she was charmed with this testimony of her sister's affection, joined in sentiment with her uncle, expressing to her, how much happier she should be, to see her settle herself by marriage, and imitate the good life and example of their excellent mother.

'I am not, you know,' says she, 'by the religious office I fill, tied down to all those rules, which must of course be imposed on you; my liberty remains; we shall have constant opportunities of continuing that intercourse of love, our hearts mutually desire. It will be the highest pleasure to me, to see you united to a man worthy your choice; preserving in our father's castle, that hospitality, for which it hath so long been famed; and whenever you shall