

THE ORPHAN'S CHOICE. A TALE

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The Orphan's Choice. A Tale by Eliza

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ORPHAN'S CHOICE:

A TALE.

BY ELIZA * * * * *

AUTHOR OF "THE COUSINS," "THE WAY OF PEACE," &c.

Earth will forsake;—oh! happy to have given
The unbroken heart's first fragrance unto heaven

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1830.

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THE ORPHAN'S CHOICE.

CHAPTER I.

“Set your affection on things above, not on things
on the earth.”

AT a little distance from a small and retired village, a few miles southward of a large manufacturing town in one of the midland counties, there was, ten years ago, a narrow and grassy lane, across which the ancient oak-trees had met so nearly, that they formed a long and natural bower. Its smooth, green pathway was rarely trod by any, except two persons who inhabited a small white-washed cottage, built in the seclusion of the lane. It was almost hid amongst the profusion of jessamines and

honeysuckles which clung to its walls, and curtained the diamond panes of its windows, as though they sought to conceal the lowly dwelling from the stranger's eye, by covering it with their own simple beauty; while flowers, such as cottage gardens produce, were glowing in all the brilliance of their various colours at the front of the house.

One evening, when the autumn sun was sinking behind the old oaks, and casting its shadowy radiance through their leaves upon the cottage, a young girl stood at one of the small casements, which was half opened, so as to admit the tendrils of woodbine which crept over it. She seemed about fourteen, though an air of thought, somewhat at variance with the youthfulness of her appearance, might have suggested the idea that she was older. She was very pale; and it seemed as if grief were already acquainting itself with her, for her eyelashes were moistened with tears, and her

cheek wore the traces of weeping. She did not speak, but gazed mournfully on the departing sun, as if it suggested some sad and painful thoughts, while her eyes filled ever and anon with tears, notwithstanding her endeavours to repress them.

The young mourner stood at the window a long time, till the sun entirely receded from her gaze; and the twilight of a September evening succeeded the crimson glow of his parting rays; and her thoughts becoming more and more sorrowful, her tears were no longer restrained, but fell like rain-drops on the clustering leaves, which, gently agitated by the mild breeze, played unheeded around her. There seemed to be no violence in her grief: it was like the calm deep sorrow of maturer years, rather than the bitter but evanescent trouble which belongs to early youth; it was the noiseless affliction that weighs down the soul, and refuses to be comforted, rather than the keen anguish

only increased her sorrow, by the idea that very soon the voice whose sound had ever been as music to her affectionate heart, would be heard no more, and, except in her sorrowful thoughts, that kind and beloved parent would have no existence; for Marian had not learned to think of the life which is beyond the grave. Nor was Mrs. Ormiston surprised at her tears. Until this evening, Marian had never suffered it to enter into her thoughts that her mother's would be a "sickness unto death;" and she had only heard of the hopelessness of the disease by accident, for Mrs. Ormiston, with perhaps blameable tenderness, had concealed the distressing truth from her.

On this afternoon, Mr. Claverton, the clergyman of their little village, had paid one of his accustomed visits to Mrs. Ormiston, during the time that Marian, in compliance with her mother's wish, was taking a solitary walk in the fields. On

her return, she found the spirits of the invalid much depressed; and learning who had been at the cottage while she was absent, she exclaimed, as she observed with sorrow her mother's pallid face and tearful eye, "I wish Mr. Claverton would never come here, mamma; you are always so sad after he is gone!"

"You mistake the cause from which my sadness proceeds," answered Mrs. Ormiston: "it is not Mr. Claverton, but my own thoughts and feelings that depress me. He is my most valuable friend, Marian: he has benefitted me more—oh! how much more, than all the medical advisers whom your anxiety, my child, has induced me to consult; for he has taught me that which cannot indeed preserve my body, but which will save my soul from eternal death."

Marian supposed her mother was alluding to the religious instructions of Mr. Claverton, but she did not quite understand what Mrs. Ormiston had said; so

she remained silent for several minutes. At length she approached her mamma, and seating herself at the foot of the couch, she observed: "I had such a sweet walk this afternoon, and so many pleasant thoughts came into my mind as I strolled along the green fields, and amused myself by gathering a nosegay of wild flowers! This rose, look, dear mamma, I had so much trouble in obtaining it, for the thorns pierced through my gloves, and hurt my fingers, but at last I plucked it from the tree; and I said to myself, "This is just like mamma and me: we have had a many troubles, and she has long been very ill, but she will soon recover, and in spite of the thorns, we shall obtain the rose of happiness at last."

Mrs. Ormiston smiled mournfully, and desired her to repeat some more of her pleasant thoughts. Delighted to think that she amused her mother, Marian continued, with a cheerful smile: "Oh! dear mamma,