

CHAPTER VII.

Soft as the memory of buried love,
Pure as the prayer which childhood wafts above,
Was she.

BYRON.

UNMARRIED men of warm affections and social habits begin often, after turning their fortieth year, to feel themselves too much alone in the world for happiness, and to look forward with more of fear than of desire to a solitary and friendless old age. William Forsyth, a man of the kindest feelings, on completing his forty-first year was still a widower. His mother had declined into the vale of life; his two brothers had settled down, as has been already related, in distant parts of the country. There were occasional gaps, too, occurring in the circle in which he moved. Disease, decay, and accident kept up the continual draught of death; friends and familiar faces were dropping away and disappearing; and he began to find that he was growing too solitary for his own peace. The wound, however, which his affections had sustained, rather more than ten years before, had been gradually closing under the softening influence of time. The warmth of his affections and the placidity of his temper fitted him in a peculiar manner for domestic happiness; and it was his great good fortune to meet, about this period, with a lady through whom, all unwittingly on her own part, he was taught to regard himself as no longer solitary in the