SIMON GRAY.

No man's life seemed to promise a calmer course and a more serene close than that of the Reverend Simon Gray. He had for many years possessed the entire affection and respect of all the inhabitants of his parish. A few words from him calmed angry blood, settled quarrels, and allayed animosity. In his kirk, in his manse, in his neighbour's house, in the field, and by the way-side, he was, in good truth, the minister of peace. In his own family his happiness was perfect. His wife was, in all things, after his own heart; and two sons and one daughter, just reaching man and woman's estate, had scarcely ever given their parents distress, and seemed destined for a life of respectability and happiness. But it is with the humble as with the high in this world; their possessions are equally insecure; and the same lesson may be learnt from the life of the lowliest peasant, as from that of the loftiest king. From the cottage and from the palace the same warning voice is heard to say, "Call no man happy till he dies."

Simon Gray's eldest son, a youth of distinguished talents, and even more tenderly beloved than admired by all who knew him, was drowned in a moorland loch in his father's parish, one warm summer evening, when his parents were sitting at no great distance, in a hollow among the hills. They heard his cries, but could do nothing to save him, when, rushing to the water's weedy and rushy edge, they saw him sinking in miserable entanglement among the long strong roots of the water-lilies. Of the shock their hearts and whole being then got, nothing need be said; but from that evening, well as they were both thought to support it, every one in the parish felt that they never were the same people as before, that their faces never wore such bright smiles, and that the minister and his wife often looked to each other when in company, with tearful eyes, as if an accidental word or allusion had awakened in their hearts a remembrance too tender or too terrible. Michael would have been, had he lived, his father's successor; and some thought that the manse never looked exactly like itself since that fatal event.

But this was but the beginning of Simon's sorrows. His other son was a clerk in a commercial house in the neighbouring city, and in the unreserved confidence of his employers. Regularly every Saturday did he walk out to the Manse—stay over the Sabbath—and next morning before breakfast appear at his desk. But one dark and stormy winter evening, in the middle of the week, he unexpectedly entered his father's study, and flinging himself down upon his kness, declared that he was a ruined and lost man—that he had formed a guilty connection with a woman who had led him on to his destruction,—and that he had embezzled his benefactor's money—done worse—forged his name, and that, unless he could make his escape, he must expiate his crime on a scaffold.

Simon Gray lifted up his son from his knees, and folded him to his heart. "My poor wretched boy—thy life is in jeopardy! Oh! that I knew how to save my son! Stephen—Stephen—what would signify the breaking of my heart if thou wast but safe! Speak not—my sweet boy—of thy crimes, great as they are. I am thy father, and can now think but of thy death, and thy life. Fly, Stephen, and take with thee thy father's blessing. Perhaps all thy money is gone—I will give thee enough to pursue thy journey—and so also may I be able to repay all thou hast embezzled. O, Stephen—Stephen—my beloved boy, who hast so often sat in thine innocence on my knees, and whom so often I have put to bed after thy prayers, has it indeed come to this?" And father and son knelt down together and prayed unto their God. It was a black stormy night, and Stephen went away without seeing his mother or sister. He went away—but he never returned. He made his escape to America, and died, in a few weeks after his arrival, of the yellow fever.

The miserable father knew not how to break the matter to his wife and daughter. They saw his affliction,—and he told them he feared Stephen was a profligate. But next night, the outer door opened loudly, and two officers of justice entered the manse. Now, all concealment was at an end; and next day it was known, not only to the inmates of the manse, but to all the inhabitants of the parish, that Stephen Gray was a criminal, and had fled to a foreign land.

Over the grave of the eldest son, his parents could shed tears of a resigned sadness; but for him who died untended beyond the sea, their grief was bitter and inconsolable. No one ever uttered Stephen's name, although there was not a house in all the parish where his cheerful laugh had not been welcome. Ill as he had behaved, dishonestly and vilely, affection for his memory was in every heart. But a grave look or a sigh was all in which any one could show this sorrow and sympathy now; and the minister of Seatoun understood the silence of his parishioners, for his dead son had been a felon—aye, Stephen, the gay, witty, fearless, and affectionate Stephen had been a felon. He had written a letter to his father on his death-bed —a few words—but they were impressed for ever on his father's soul, and often did he repeat them in his sleep, as the tears forced their way through his closed eyelids, and drenched his heaving breast.

The terror struck into the heart of Stephen's Sister by the sudden bursting in of the officers of justice into the manse, in some degree affected her intellects;

her memory from that night was impaired, and after her brother's death in America had been communicated to her, she frequently forgot it, and weeping, implored to know if he had not lately written home. "He must be dead, or he would have written;" and she kept walking about the house, from one room to another, repeating these words with a wailing voice and sorely wringing her hands. That could not last long; without any disease, she lay down on her bed, and never more rose. She was buried by the side of her brother Michael,—and now Simon Gray was childless.

Misfortunes, it is said, come in clouds; and indeed one is often not the forerunner merely, but the cause of another, till a single loss appears, on reflection, to have been the source of utter misery, ruin, and desolation. Each of these deaths took away a portion of Simon Gray's fortitude; but still, after a few months, he had carried over his whole awakened heart upon the survivor. Now there was no one left for a parent's love; and it was buried below the last slab that laid its weight on his family burial-place. To be sure, poor Stephen was not there—but he had his memorial too, beside his brother and sister, for his crimes had not divided him from one loving heart—and few but his parents' eyes looked on the stone that bore his name and the number of his years.

Under all these afflictions, Simon's wife seemed to bear herself up to the wonder of all who beheld her.

She attended to every thing about the house as before; none of her duties to the poor or rich among her parishioners were neglected; and but for her, it was said, that her husband must have sunk under his sorrows. But little do we know of each other's hearts. Simon Gray was disconsolate—miserable—despairing: but his health did not suffer—and he was able to discharge his ordinary duties as before, after a short suspension. She who administered comfort to him, sometimes in vain, needed it more even than himself; for her grief preyed inwardly, in the midst of that serene resignation, and struck in upon her very heart. Her strength decayed—she drew her breath with pain—and although no one, not even her medical attendants, feared immediate danger, yet one day she was found dead, sitting in a bower in the garden, to which she had retired to avoid the noon-day sun. Death had come gently into that bower, and touched her heart, perhaps in a slumber. Her head was reclining against the green leaves, and the Bible had not even fallen out of her hand.

The calamities that had befallen the Minister of Seatoun were as great as heart or imagination can conceive. Yet such calamities have been borne by many human beings, who have so far recovered from their shock as afterwards to enjoy some satisfaction in their existence. Men have we all known, with cheerful countenances, and apparently placid minds, whose best enjoyments have been sorely cut down; and who, at one time, no doubt, thought and felt that for them, never more could there be one glimpse of joy upon this earth. But necessity is to many afflicted spirits, although a stern yet a sure comforter. The heart in its agonies of grief is rebellious, and strives to break asunder the fetters of its fate. But that mood cannot be sustained. It is irrational and impious, and the soul can find true rest only in resignation and submission. Then mingled motives to better and calmer thoughts arise.—Men see the wisdom and the virtue of a temperate sorrow,—the folly and the wickedness of outrageous grief. They begin to wish to obey the laws that ought to regulate the feelings of mortal creatures. In obeying them there is consolation, and a lightening of the sore burden of their distress. Then come blessed thoughts of the reward of the righteous who have gone to God—remembrances of all their beauty, innocence, or goodness, while they sojourned with us here;—and hope, faith, and belief that we shall yet meet them face to face, and be no more severed. Thus does time cure the wounds of the heart, just as it covers the grave with verdure and with flowers. We cannot, if we would, live without often sorrowing; but neither can we, if we would, sorrow always. God is kinder to us than we are to ourselves, and he lifts us up when, in blind passion, we would fain lie grovelling hopelessly in the dust.

So is it with many—perhaps with most men—but it is not so with all. It was not so with him of whom we now speak. The death of his children he bore with resignation, and thought of them in peace. But when his soul turned from them to their mother it was suddenly disquieted; and day after day, week after week, and month after month, was it drawn with a more sickening and disconsolate passion of grief to her grave. An overwhelming tenderness for ever drowned his soul—haunted was he for ever by her image, dressed as he had never seen her, but as he knew she now was drest,—in a shroud. The silence of his room —of the whole house—of the garden—the glebe—and all the fields around, was insupportable: he prayed to forget her; and then, with a gush of tears, he prayed that he might never cease for one moment to think of her while he lived. Why, some one might have asked, was this man so distressed, so distracted, so infatuated in his grief? Who was she that had been taken from him? Did all the beauty of the skies, all the gladness of the earth, all affection, love, joy, and thought centre but in her alone? Had the mercy of God, and his bounty to this being whom he still supported, been utterly extinguished when the eyes of her whom he loved were closed in death? Who and what may she have been that must thus madly and hopelessly be for ever deplored?

To an indifferent heart, these questions could not have been satisfactorily answered. She who had died, and who was thus ceaselessly bewailed, was but one of many many, most worthy when known to be beloved, but who, undistinguished among their fellow-creatures, live, and die, and go to Heaven. Simon Gray had married her when they were both young, both humble, as indeed they always had been, and both poor. She brought to him pure affection, a heart full of tenderness and pity, a disposition as sweet as ever tinged a woman's cheek with smiles, cheerfulness never obscured, simple thoughts reconciled in joy to a simple life, and a faith in religion as perfect as in the light of the outer day. In her quiet and narrow neighbourhood she was thought not without her beauty; and whatever that might have been, it sufficed to delight the heart and soul of Simon Gray, when she became his bride. For twenty years never had they been a whole day apart. No change had ever taken place in their affection, but such change as nature graciously brings when new loves and new duties arise to bless the wedded life. Simon Gray never thought of comparing his wife with others. In herself she was a bliss to him. God gave her to him, and perhaps he thought in his soul that he might be resigned were God to take her away. Such was the spirit that breathed over his constant thoughts, and actions, and discourses; and in him it was unaffected and sincere. But who knows his own soul? God did take her away, and then it was known to him how ungrateful and how miserably weak was his heart, how charged haunted and torn with vain passion and lamentation, with outcries of grief that have no comfort, with recklessness and despair.

He seemed now to be without any object in this world. His very zeal in the cause he sincerely loved was deadened,—and he often durst not say the things he ought when preaching of the loving kindness of his God. The seat below the pulpit, and close to it, where for so many years he had seen the composed and attentive faces of his beloved wife and children, was now often empty,—or people in it he cared not for,—indeed he cared less and less every Sabbath for the congregation he had long so truly loved, and the bell that formerly sent a calm joy into his heart, ringing through the leafy shelter of the summer trees or tinkling in the clear winter sky, now gave pangs of grief, or its sound was heard with indifference and apathy. He was in many things unconsciously a changed man indeed,—and in some where he perceived and felt the change, with unavailing self-upbraiding and with fear and trembling before his Creator and Redeemer. This sore and sad alteration in their Minister was observed with grief and compassion by all his parishioners. But what could they do for him? They must not obtrude themselves too often on the privacy, the sanctity of sorrow; but he was remembered in their prayers, and many an eye wept, and many a voice faultered, when by the cottage firesides they talked of their poor Minister's afflictions, and the woeful change that had been wrought in so short a time within that Manse, which had so long stood like the abode of an almost perfect blessedness.

A rueful change was indeed beginning to take place in the state of Simon Gray's soul, of which no one out of the Manse could have had any suspicion, and which for a while was not suspected even by his own attached and faithful servants. Without comfort, under the perpetual power of despondency and depression, hopeless, and not wishing for hope, afraid at last of the uncompanioned silence of his solitary hearth, and with a mind certainly weakened in some degree by that fever of grief, Simon Gray dimly turned his thoughts to some means of alleviating his miseries, be they what they might, and he began to seek sleep during the night from the influence of dangerous drugs. These often gave him nights unhaunted by those beloved spectres whose visits were unsupportable to his soul. They occasioned even thoughts and fancies alien and remote from what he so loved and feared; and now and then touched his disconsolate spirit with something like a gleam of transitory gladness. One moment to be happy, was something that his weakened mind conceived to be a gain. Afraid and terrified with his own thoughts, great relief was it to be placed, even for the shortest time, out of their tormenting power. The sentence of death was then, as it were, remitted,—or, at least, a respite granted, or the hope of a respite. And when his fire was out—the Manse dark and silent, and the phantoms about to return, he flew to this medicine in an agony, and night after night, till at last it followed regularly the unhappy man's prayers, and Simon Gray, so that his loss might be buried in oblivion, resigned himself into that visionary or insensible sleep.

No doubt his mental sufferings were often thus relieved; but the sum of his misery was increased. Horrid phantasies sometimes assailed him,—his health suffered,—a deep remorse was added to his other agonies,—the shame, the perturbation of despicable vice, and the appalling conviction brought in flashes upon his understanding, that it too was weakened, and that his life might terminate in imbecility or madness.

He had now several separate states of existence, that came by degrees into ghastly union. One was his own natural, widowed, childless, forlorn, uncompanioned, and desolate condition—without one glimpse of comfort, and unendurable altogether to his cold and sickened heart. From that he flew, in desperation, into a world of visions. Then the dead seemed reanimated—the silent burst into song—and sunshine streamed, as of yore, through the low windows of the Manse, and fragrance from the clambering honeysuckle filled every room. The frenzied man forgot his doom, and whenever a door opened, he looked to see his wife and children. The potent drugs then blessed his brain; and his countenance beamed with smiles sad to behold, born of that lamentable delusion. But ere long this spell began to dissolve. Then came horrid hints of the truth. One corpse after another lay before him—he knew them, and went up to close their eyes—then a sense of his own pitiable prostration of mind came over him, and still unable to know certainly whether he was or was not a childless widower, he would burst out into a long hysterical laugh, strike his burning forehead, and then fling himself down on bed or floor, to him alike, or sit in his lonely room, in utter stupefaction, and with cheeks bathed in tears. The servants would come in, and look upon him in pity, and then go their ways, without uttering a word.

The whole manners and appearance of the Minister of Seatoun were now visibly changed to the most careless eye. His sedate and gentle demeanour was converted into a hurried and distracted wildness. Sometimes he was observed in black melancholy and despair,—and then again in a sort of aimless and unbecoming glee. His dress was not the same,—his countenance had the wrinkles but not the paleness of grief,—his hand trembled, and his voice sounded not like the voice of the same man. A miserable rumour spread over the parish. The austere expressed dissatisfaction,—the gentle pitied,—the thoughtless smiled;—but all confessed that such a change had never been known before as that which had taken place in the Minister of Seatoun,—and that, alas! his life was likely to end in disgrace as well as sorrow. His degradation could not be concealed. Simon Gray the simple, the temperate, the pious, and the just, was now a wine-bibber and a drunkard.

The Manse now stood as if under bann of excommunication. All the gravel walks, once so neat, were overgrown with weeds; the hedges were unpruned; cattle browzed often in the garden; and dust and cobwebs stained and darkened every window. Instead of the respectable farmers of the parish, the elders, or some of the few neighbouring gentry, being seen entering or leaving the Manse, none but men of doubtful reputation, or bad, opened the gate—strangers of mean appearance, and skulking demeanour, haunted it, and lingered about at twilight—and not unfrequently the noise, clamour, and quarrelling of drunken revelry startled the passer by from bounds wherein, at such hours formerly, all had been silent, except, perhaps, the sweet sound of the evening psalm.

It was not possible that all respect could easily or soon be withdrawn from a man once so universally and so deservedly honoured. His vice proceeded from the weakness of his heart, that had lived too much on its own love and on its own happiness, and when these stays were removed fell down into this humiliation. Many excuses,—many palliations,—many denials were framed for him, and there was often silence at his name. After almost all respect was gone, affection remained nearly as strong as before, for that Simon Gray had been a good man none denied, and now too were joined to the affection for him a profound pity and pure compassion. "Was he not a widower? Was he not childless? Surely few had been tried as he had been tried, —and it was easy to see that the poor man's grief had affected his brain. The minister is not in his right mind,—but we trust in God that he may get better." Such were the words of many and the wishes of all. For he had no enemies,—and he had for nearly twenty years been a friend to them all, both in things temporal and things eternal.

But the hour of his ruin was fast approaching. Perhaps the miserable man knew that he was lost. Perhaps he took an insane pleasure in looking forward to his utter destruction. He was now the abject slave of his vice—whatever passed within his troubled and often clouded mind, he seemed often to have no shame now—no desire of concealment, but was seen in the open day-light, in presence of old age that mourned, and childhood that could only wonder, a rueful spectacle of degradation, laughing or perhaps weeping, with his senses drowned or inflamed, ignorant of himself and of his profession, and seemingly forgetful even of the name of his parish, and of the house in whose quiet secrecy he had passed so many years of temperance, happiness, and virtue.

A melancholy confusion was now in all his mind. Subjects once familiar to him were now almost forgotten; truths once clear to him as sunshine were now no more known; the great doctrines of Christianity which he had so long taught with simplicity and fervour, became to his weakened and darkened understanding words without meaning; even the awful events of his Saviour's life, from the hour when he was laid in the manger, till he died on the cross, were at times dimly recognized, for all now was glimmering and ghastly in the world of his memory. One night he was seen sitting beside the graves of his wife and children. The infatuated man fixed on them his glazed and wild eyes, and muttered unintelligible lamentations and blessings. Most sad—most shocking—most terrible, was it to behold such a man in such a place, in such pitiable degradation. For one year had not yet elapsed since Simon Gray had been leading a life of innocent simplicity, a perfect model of what ought to be the simple and austere minister of a simple and austere church. There he was seen by a few, now wringing his hands, now patting the tombstone on his wife's grave, now kneeling down, now kissing it, now lifting up his convulsed face to Heaven, alternately yielding to a wailing tenderness, and a shuddering horror—forgetful now of every thing but the dim confusion of all those deaths and his own miseries, and now seemingly assailed with a dreadful consciousness of his miserable degradation, till, with a horrid groan, long, low, and deep of mortal grief, he rose up from the ground, gazed ghastly round all over the tombstones with a bewildered eye, glared upon the little kirk and its spire now bright with the light of the setting sun, and then, like a wandering and punished ghost, disappeared into the shady and neglected garden of the Manse.

Enslaved as Simon Gray now was to his vice, or, indeed, disease, yet such was the solemn and awful power over his mind which the Sabbath-day possessed, that he had never once polluted or violated its sanctity. In cases of furious insanity, it has been known that patients whose lives had been religious have felt the influence of strong habitual association, and kept a wild Sabbath even in their cells. With the Minister of Seatoun this mysterious force had hitherto imposed a saving restraint. His congregation was sadly thinned, but still he performed divine service; and no one at least could say that they had ever seen the wretched man under the dominion of the sin, that so easily beset him, in the pulpit. But that hour now came; and he was ruined past all earthly redemption.

Next day the Elders went to the Manse. His servants made no opposition to their entrance, nor did they deny that their Minister was at home. They had not, indeed, seen him since the evening before; but they had heard his footsteps and his voice, and knew that he was not dead. So the Elders walked up stairs to his room, and found him sitting near the window, looking out upon the church-yard, through and below the rich flowery foliage of the horse-chesnuts and sycamores that shadowed both Manse and Kirk. He was fully awakened to the horrors of his situation, and for a while spoke not a word. "Come down with me into the parlour," he said; and they did so. They all sat down, and there was yet silence. They feared to turn their eyes upon him, as he stood by himself in the midst of them—pallid, ghastly, shuddering,—the big burning tears of guilt, and shame, and despair, falling down upon the floor. "Lost am I in this world and the next! I have disgraced the order to which I belong—I have polluted the church—I have insulted the God who made me, and the Saviour who redeemed me! Oh! never was there a sinner like unto me!" He dashed himself down on the floor—and beseeched that no one would lift him up. "Let me hear your voices, while I hide my face. What have you to say unto your wretched minister? Say it quickly—and then leave me lying on the floor. Lift me not up!"

His body lay there, in this prostration of the spirit, before men who had all known him, loved him, respected him, venerated him, not more than one year ago. Much of that was for ever gone now; but much remained unextinguishable in their hearts. Some of them were austere, and even stern men, of his own age, or older than he; but there are times and occasions when the sternest become the most compassionate. So was it now. They had come not to upbraid or revile,—not even to rebuke. They brought with them sorrow and tribulation, and even anguish in their souls. For they knew that his ministry was at an end; that Simon Gray was now nothing unto them but a fallen and frail being, whose miseries, they themselves fallen and frail too were by nature called upon to pity—and they wished, if possible, to give comfort and advice, and to speak with him of his future life. Why should they be stern or cruel to this man? They had sat often and often at his simple board when his wife and family graced and blessed it;—he, too, had often and often familiarly and brotherly sat in all their houses, humble, but scarcely more humble than his own—he had joined some of them in wedlock—baptized their children—remembered them in his public prayers when any of them had been threatened with death—he had prayed, too, by their bedsides in their own houses—he had given them worldly counsel—and assisted them in their worldly trials—and was all this to be forgotten now? And were they to harden their hearts against him? Or, were not all these things to be remembered with a grateful distinctness; and to soften their hearts; and even to bedew their faces with tears; and to fill their whole souls with pity, sorrow, affection, and the sadness of brotherly love towards him who so good in many things, had, at last, been weighed in the balance and found wanting? They all felt alike now, however different their dispositions and characters. They did not long suffer him to lie on the floor—they lifted him up—tried to comfort him—wept along with him,—and when the miserable man implored one of the number to offer a prayer for him, they all solemnly knelt down, and hoped that God, who was now called upon to forgive his sins, would extend his mercy to all the fellow-sinners who were then together upon their knees.

Simon Gray was no more a Minister of the Church of Scotland, and he left the parish. It was thought by many that he was dead—that shame and remorse, and the disease that clung close to his soul, had killed him at last. But it was not so. The hour was not yet come, and his death was destined to be of a different kind indeed.

The unfortunate man had a brother who, for many years, had lived on a great sheep-farm in Strathglass, a wild district of the northern Highlands. He had always stood high in the esteem and love of this uneducated, but intelligent farmer—he had visited him occasionally with his wife and children for a few days, and had received similar visits in return. This good and worthy man had grieved for Simon's bereavement, and his subsequent frailties; and now he opened the door of his house, and of his heart, to his degraded, and remorseful, and repentant brother. His own wife, his sons, and his daughters, needed not to be told to treat with tenderness, respect, and pity, the most unfortunate man; and on the evening, when he came to their house, they received him with the most affectionate warmth, and seemed, by the cheerfulness of their manners, not even to know of the miserable predicament in which he stood. Happy were all the young people to see their uncle in the Highlands, although at first they felt sad and almost surprised to observe that he was dressed just like their father, in such clothes as become, on decent occasions, a hard working labouring man, a little raised above the wants of the world.

Even before the heart of poor Simon Gray had time to be touched, or at least greatly revived, by the unrestrained kindness of all those worthy people, the very change of scenery had no inconsiderable effect in shrouding in oblivion much of his past misery. Here, in this solitary glen, far, far away from all who had witnessed his vices and his degradation, he felt relieved from a load of shame that had bowed him to the earth. Many long miles of moor—many great mountains—many wide straths and glens—many immense lakes—and a thousand roaring streams and floods were now between him and the manse of Seatoun—the kirk where he had been so miserably exposed—and the air of his parish, that lay like a load on his eyes when they had dared to lift themselves up to the sunshine. Many enormous belts and girdles of rock separated him from all these; he felt safe in his solitude from the power of excommunication; and there was none to upbraid him with their black silent countenances as he walked by himself along the heathery shores of a Highland loch, or plunged into a dark pine-forest, or lay upon the breast of some enormous mountain, or sat by the roar of some foaming cataract. And when he went into a lonely shealing, or a smoky hut, all the dwellers there were unknown to him—and, blessed be God, he was unknown to them; —their dress, their gaze, their language, their proffered food and refreshment, were all new—they bore no resemblance to what he had seen and heard in his former life. That former life was like a far off, faint, and indistinct, dream. But the mountain—the forest —the glen—the cataract—the loch—the rocks—the huts—the deer—the eagles—the wild Gaelic dresses—and that wilder speech—all were real,—they constituted the being of his life now; and, as the roar of the wind came down the glens, it swept away the remembrance of his sins and his sorrows.

But a stronger, at least a more permanent power was in his brother's house, and it was that from which his recovery or restoration was ultimately to proceed.

The sudden desolation of his heart that in so brief a period had been robbed of all it held dear, had converted Simon Gray from temperance almost austere, into a most pitiable state of vicious indulgence; and his sudden restoration now to domestic comfort and objects of interest to a good man's human feelings, began to work almost as wonderful a conversion from that wretched habit to his former virtue. New eyes were upon him—new hearts opened towards him—new voices addressed him with kindness—new objects were presented to his mind. The dull, dreary, silent, forsaken, and haunted Manse, where every room swarmed with unendurable thoughts, was exchanged for an abode entirely free from all recollections and associations, either too affecting, or too afflicting. The simple gladness that reigned in his brother's house stole insensibly into his soul, reviving and renovating it with feelings long unknown. There was no violent or extravagant joy in which he could not partake, and that might form a distressing and galling contrast with his own grief. A homely happiness was in the house, in every room, and about every person, and he felt himself assimilated, without effort of his own, in some measure to the cheerful, blameless, and industrious beings with whom it was now his lot to associate. He had thought himself lost, but he felt that yet might he be saved; he had thought himself excommunicated from the fellowship of the virtuous, but he felt himself treated, not only with affection, but respect by his excellent brother, all his nephews and nieces, and the servants of the house. His soul hoped that its degradation was not utter and irretrievable. Human beings, he began to see, could still love, still respect, even while they pitied him; and this feeling of being not an outcast from his kind, encouraged him humbly to lift his eyes up to God, and less ruefully, and not with such bitter agony, to prostrate himself in prayer.

He thus found himself lifted out of the den of perdition;—and, escaped into the clear unhaunted light, he felt unspeakable horror at the thought of voluntarily flinging himself back again among these dreadful agonies. His brother rejoiced to behold the change so unexpectedly sudden in all his habits; and, when they went out together in the evenings to walk among the glens, that simple man laid open to Simon all his heart—spoke to him of all his affairs—requested his advice—and behaved towards him with such entire and sincere respect and affection, that the fallen man felt entitled again to hold up his head, and even enjoyed hours of internal peace and satisfaction, which at first he was afraid to suffer, lest they might be the offspring of apathy or delusion. But day after day they more frequently returned and more lastingly remained; and then Simon Gray believed that God was, indeed, accepting his repentance, and that his soul might yet not be utterly lost.

Simon Gray went out with the servants to their work, himself a servant. He worked for his brother and his children, and while his body was bent, and his hands were busy, his heart was at rest. The past could not take direful possession of him when labouring in the fields, or in the garden, or in the barn, or searching for the sheep in snow or tempest, with his brother or his nephews. The pure fresh air blew around his temples—the pure fresh water was his drink—toil brought hunger which the simple meal appeased—and for every meal that his brother blest, did he himself reverently return thanks to God. So was it settled between them; and Simon Gray, on such occasions, in fervid eloquence, expressed his heart.

He rose with the light or the lark—all his toils were stated—all his hours of rest; and in a few months he was even like one who, from his boyhood, had been a Shepherd or a tiller of the earth.

In this humble, laborious, and, it may be said, happy life, years past over his head, which was now getting white. Suffice it to say, that once more Simon Gray was as temperate as a hermit. He knew—he remembered—he repented all his former shameful transgressions. But now they were to him only as a troubled dream. Now, too, could he bear to think on all his former life before he was tried and fell—of his beloved Susanna and the children sleeping by her side in Seatoun church-yard—and of that dear, but guilty boy, who died in a foreign land. In his solitary labours in the field, or on his chaff bed, his mind, and his heart, and his soul were often in the happy Manse of former years. He walked in the garden and down the burn-side, through the birchwood, and by the little waterfall, with his wife, and boys and girl—and then could he bear to think of the many many Sabbaths he had officiated in his own kirk, on all the baptisms, and that other greater Sacrament, administered, on beautiful weather, in the open air, and beneath the shadow of that wide-armed sycamore. Calmly, now, and with an untroubled spirit, did he think on all these things; for he was reconciled to his present lot, which, he knew, must never be changed, and to his humbled heart came soothingly and sweet all the voices of the dead, and all the shadows of the past. He knew now the weakness of his own soul. Remorse and penitence had brought up all its secrets before him; and in resignation and contentment, morning and evening, did he for all his gracious mercies praise God.

Simon had taught his brother's children, and they all loved him as their very father. Some of their faces were like the faces of their dead cousins—and some of them bore the very same voices. So seemed it that his very children were restored to him—the power of the grave was weakened over his heart—and though he sometimes felt, and said himself, that the living, though like the dead, were not his own blessed creatures, yet he gave them up all of a father's heart that was not buried in those graves which had so quickly, one after the other, employed the old sexton's spade. And often, no doubt, when his heart was perfectly calm and happy, did he love his brother's children even as he had loved his own.

Many years thus passed away, and with them almost all tradition, in this part of the country, of Simon's degradation from the clerical order. It had faded in simple hearts occupied with their own feelings; and when he was in company with others at church or market, not even those who knew all the circumstances of his case could be said to remember them—they saw before them only a plain, simple, grave, and contented person like themselves, in a humble walk of life. Simon's own mind had been long subdued to his lot. He felt himself to be what he appeared; and he was distinguishable from his brother, whom in aspect and figure he greatly resembled, only by an air of superior intelligence and cultivation. His hands were, like his brother's, hardened by the implements of labour—his face was as embrowned by the sun—and his dress, on week-day and Sabbath, alike plain, and in all respects that of a respectable tenant. It seemed now that he was likely to terminate his blameless life in peace.

His brother was now obliged to go to the Lowlands on the affairs of his farm, and so many years having elapsed since Simon's degradation, he felt an irresistible desire to revisit, once before he died, the neighbourhood at least of his dear parish once his own, if not the dear parish itself. Many must have now forgotten him; and indeed ten years, at his period of life, and all his severe miseries, had done the work of twenty—so although but sixty years of age, he seemed at least a man of threescore and ten. Accordingly he accompanied his brother to the Lowlands—once more walked about the streets and squares of the City, where so many changes had taken place that he scarcely knew his way, and where the very population itself seemed entirely changed. He felt comforted that no eye rested upon him; and next day—a fine clear bright frost, and the ground covered with snow—he went with his brother to a village distant about ten miles only from his own Manse of Seatoun. But a river and two ranges of hills lay between —so there was little danger of his meeting any one who would recognize him to have been the minister of that parish. Simon was happy, but thoughtful, and his nearness to the place of his former life did not, he thought, affect him so powerfully, at least not so overwhelmingly as he had expected. A party of farmers from different districts dined together, and after dinner one of them, whose treatment of Simon, though not absolutely insulting, had been rude and boisterous all day, began to indulge in very brutal talk, and to swallow liquor with an evident design to produce intoxication. Simon endeavoured to avoid all conversation with this person, but on one occasion could not avoid gently remonstrating with him on his grossness. He also kindly dissuaded him from drinking too much, a sin of which, from bitter experience, he had known the miserable effects, and of which he had in many others wrought the cure. But his remonstrance enraged the young farmer, who, it seems, came from the parish of Seatoun, and knew Simon's whole history. He burst out into the most ferocious invectives against his reprover, and soon showed that he was but too intimately acquainted with all the deplorable and degrading circumstances of the case. In the coarsest terms he informed the whole company who they had got amongst them; directed their attention to the solemn hypocrisy of his countenance; assured them that his incontinence had not been confined to drinking; and that even in the Highlands, the old sinner had corrupted the menials in his brother's house, and was the reproach of all Lowlanders that visited Strathglass.

This sudden, unprovoked, and unexpected brutality annihilated Simon's long gathered fortitude. The shocking, coarse, and unfeeling words were not all false —and they brought upon his troubled and sickening heart not the remembrance of his woeful transgression, but it may be said its very presence. Ten years of penitence, and peace, and virtue, and credit, were at once destroyed,—to him they were as nothing,—and he was once more Simon Gray the sinner, the drunkard, the disgraced, the degraded, the madman. He looked around him, and it seemed as if all eyes were fixed upon him with pity, or contempt, or scorn. He heard malicious whisperings—curious interrogatories —and stifled laughter; and, loud over all, the outrageous and brutal merriment of his insulter, the triumphant peal of self-applauding brutality, and the clenched hand struck upon the table in confirmation of the truth of his charge, and in defiance of all gainsayers. Simon Gray saw—heard no more. He rushed out of the room in an agony of shame and despair, and found himself standing alone in the darkness.

He thanked God that it was a wild, stormy, winter-night. The farmers had not ventured to mount their horses in that snow-drift—but Simon turned his face to the flaky blast, and drove along knee-deep, turning a deaf ear to his brother's voice which he heard shouting his name. He knew not whither he was thus rushing —for as yet he had no determined purpose in his mind. One wish alone had he at this hour—and that was to fall down and die. But the snow was not so deep a short way out of the village, and the energy which his despair had given his limbs enabled him to pursue his solitary race through the howling darkness of the night. He noticed nothing but the tops of the hedges on each side that marked out the road;—and without aim or object, but a dim hope of death, or a passion for the concealing and hiding darkness, he thus travelled several miles, till he found himself entering upon a wide common or moor. "I am on the edge of the moor," he exclaimed to himself, "the moor of my own parish—my own Seatoun.—No eye can see me—blessed be God no eye can see me,—but mine eyes can see the shape of the small swelling hills and mounts covered though they be with snow, and neither moon nor stars in heaven. Yes, I will walk on, now that I am here, right on to the kirk of Seatoun, and will fall down upon my knees at the door of God's House, and beseech Him, after all my repentance, to restore to peace my disconsolate, my troubled, and despairing soul."

There had been but little change for ten years in that pastoral parish. The small wooden bridge across the Ewe-bank stood as it did before, and, as his feet made it shake below him, Simon's heart was filled with a crowd of thoughts. He was now within a few hundred yards of the Manse that had so long been his own, and he stood still, and trembled, and shivered, as the rush of thoughts assailed him from the disturbed world of the past. He moved on. A light was in the parlour window—the same room in which he used to sit with his wife and children. Perhaps he wept by himself in the darkness. But he hurried on—he passed the mouth of the little avenue—the hedges and shrubs seemed but little grown—through a pale glimmer in the sky, while a blast had blown away some clouds from before the yet hidden moon, he saw the spire of his own Kirk. The little gate was shut—but he knew well to open the latch. With a strange wild mixture of joy and despair he reached the door of the Kirk, and falling down prostrate in the pelting snow, he kissed the cold stone beneath his cheek, and, with a breaking heart, ejaculated, "Oh God! am I forgiven—and wilt thou take me, through the intercession of thy Son, at last into thy holy presence?"

It snowed till midnight—and the frost was bitter cold. Next morning was the Sabbath; and the old Sexton, on going to sweep the little path from tha church-yard gate to the door of the church, found what was seemingly a corpse, lying there half-covered with the drift. He lifted up the head; and well did he know the face of his former minister. The hair was like silver that formerly had been a bright brown; but the expression of the dead man's countenance was perfectly serene—and the cold night had not been felt by Simon Gray.