

on his horse, went back to his home, rejoicing that he had procured it; for what he had reaped the harvest before was now nearly all consumed. As there was no appearance of the present summer being better than the preceding one, he resolved to shut up his house and retire to Stranraer, until it should please God to remove his wrath from the land. He took this step, because there he could procure subsistence for money, although the price was exorbitant.

With regret they bade adieu to the scenes of their former happiness; and taking all their valuables and cash, locked up their home, and with their one horse, which carried the load, accompanied also by Colin, who was now old and blind, led by Helen, the sad procession moved on their dull and weary way. The land was desolate, it was the beginning of June, yet not a bud was to be seen; the whins shewed only their gaudy yellow flowers as if in mockery of the surrounding dreary scenes. Arrived at Stranraer, they found their situation much more comfortable; as provisions could be had there, although the prices were exorbitant.—Several of the inhabitants imported grain from England and Ireland, in small quantities, for themselves and such as could purchase at the price they demanded for it—which comparatively few could; and what was thus brought was in a manner concealed, or the magistrates, by act of the Estates of Scotland had the power to seize any store of grain, either in passing through the burgh or concealed in it, and sell it to the people at their own price. This prevented those who would import it from a distance, save in small quantities.

Helen's heart bled to see the famishing wretches wandering along the beach at high water, like shadows—so thin, so wasted looking with longing eyes for the retreat of the tide, that they might commence their search for any shell-fish they could find upon the rocks, or any other substance which the ingenuity of man could convert to food, however loathsome to satisfy the hunger that was consuming them. There were to be seen mothers, bearing their infants—unmindful of the rain that for days poured down, more or less; and fathers more resembling a spectre than men, either upon their knees in the middle of their family, imploring heaven for aid, or following the wave in its slow retreat

to the utmost bound with anxious looks, exulting if their search procured them a few limpets or wicks.

During this tedious summer, William Kerr returned occasionally to his deserted farm; but it lay waste and uninviting, more resembling a swamp than arable land. His heart fell within him at the sight. No one had called, everything remained as it was; even the direction he had written upon his door, telling where he was to be found, remained undefaced, save by the pelting rain. Towards autumn the weather became more warm and dry, and promised a change for the better. The family, with joy, returned once more to the farm, to prepare for better seasons. As soon as they entered the cold damp house, where fire had not been kindled for many months, Colin, the faithful and sagacious dog, blind as he was, gave a feeble bark for joy, ran tottering round each well-remembered spot; then stretching himself on his wonted lair beside the fire, which Helen was busy kindling, licked her hand as she patted his head, stretched his limbs, gave a faint howl, and expired. All felt as if they had lost a friend.

This winter was more mild than any that had been remembered for many years, and gave token of an early and genial spring.—The famine was still very severe; but hope began to appear in the faces of the most reduced and desponding. William Kerr procured seed-corn from Stranraer, and distributed some among his less wealthy neighbours to sow their lands.

For eleven long years no word had been received of Willie, the widow's son, as he had been called, although he had been often the subject of discourse at Willie Kerr's fireside. The little ebony box had never been opened since the day of the funeral. There was now little chance of his ever returning to receive its contents, and far less of Helen's ever leaving Minniegaff in quest of him; and as Elizabeth had allowed Helen, if she choose, to read the papers, William and Grizzel proposed that she should do so. She immediately opened it, and took out the packet, which was neatly sealed, and tied by a ribbon.—There was no direction upon it. Having broken it open, the first paper was found to be directed "To William B—— of B——;" and ran thus:—