

THE RETURN

the hoar-frost, till about an hour after sunrise, lay white on the grass and tombstones in the churchyard ; but before the bell rung for the congregation to assemble, it was exhaled away, and a freshness, that was only known to be autumnal by the fallen and yellow leaves that strewed the church-way path from the ash and plane trees in the avenue, encouraged the spirits to sympathise with the universal cheerfulness of all nature.

The return of the Doctor had been bruited through the parish with so much expedition, that, when the bell rung for public worship, none of those who were in the practice of stopping in the churchyard to talk about the weather were so ignorant as not to have heard of this important fact. In consequence, before the time at which the Doctor was wont to come from the back-gate which opened from the manse-garden into the churchyard, a great majority of his people were assembled to receive him.

At the last jingle of the bell, the back-gate was usually opened, and the Doctor was wont to come forth as punctually as a cuckoo of a clock at the striking of the hour ; but a deviation was observed on this occasion. Formerly, Mrs. Pringle and the rest of the family came first, and a few minutes were allowed to elapse before the Doctor, laden with grace, made his appearance. But at this time, either because it had been settled that Mr. Snodgrass was to officiate, or for some other reason, there was a breach in the observance of this time-honoured custom.

As the ringing of the bell ceased, the gate unclosed, and the Doctor came forth. He was of that easy sort of feather-bed corpulency of form that betokens good-nature, and had none of that smooth, red, well-filled protuberancy, which indicates a choleric humour and a testy temper. He was in fact what Mrs. Glibbans denominated 'a man of a gausy external.' And some little change had taken place during his absence in his visible equipage. His stockings, which were wont to be of worsted, had undergone a translation into silk ; his waist-coat, instead of the venerable Presbyterian flap-covers to the pockets, which were of Johnsonian magnitude, was become plain—his coat in all times single-breasted, with no collar, still, however, maintained its ancient characteristics ; instead, however, of the former bright black cast horn, the buttons