

- Prof. read 2 chaps

- Used picture of the depelme W Wells

CHAPTER I.

JOHNNY GIBB SETS OUT FOR THE WELLS.

^{stirk}
"HEELY, heely, Tam, ye glaiket stirk—ye hinna on the hin shelvin o' the cairt. Fat hae ye been haiverin at, min? That cauff saick 'll be tint owre the back door afore we win a mile fae hame. See 't yer belly-ban' be ticht aneuch noo. Woo, lassie! Man, ye been makin' a hantle mair adee about blaikin that graith o' yours, an kaimin the mear's tail, nor balancin' yer cairt, an' gettin' the things packit in till 't."

"Sang, that's nae vera easy deen, I can tell ye, wi' sic a mengyie o' them. Faur 'll aw pit the puckle girrs to the mear?"

"Ou, fat's the eese o' that lang stoups ahin, aw wud like tae ken? Lay that bit bauk across, an' syne tak' the aul' pleuch ryn there, an' wup it ticht atween the stays; we canna hae the beast's maet trachel't amo' their feet. Foo muckle corn pat ye in?"

^{four lippies}
"Four lippies—gweed mizzour—will that dee?"

"We'se lat it be deein. Is their trock a' in noo, aw won'er?"

"Nyod, seerly it is."

It was in the latter part of June 1839, and Johnny Gibb was preparing to set out on his annual journey to the "Walls" at Macduff. He was, at the moment of the reader's introduction to him, employed, with the assistance of his servant man, Tam Meerison, in yokin the cairt, preparatory to starting *en route*. The time was 4.30 A.M.

Johnny Gibb was the tacksman of Gushetneuk, a two-horse haudin on the property of Sir Simon Frissal of Glen-snicker; and he and his wife had spent the greater part of a very industrious lifetime on the place.

Mrs. Gibb, in personal appearance, looked to be a woman somewhere approaching sixty, in an exceedingly good state of preservation. Dumpy in figure, inclining slightly to obesity in condition, and with cheeks of the exact hue of a high-coloured apple, she was, nevertheless, understood to be far fae stoot; she was, indeed, nervish, and apt to take drows. Hence this yearly resort to the Wells at Macduff, renowned for their restorative and invigorating virtues, had come to be a necessity for her. When Johnny Gibb had got the neeps doon, he took his carts to the mill-dam, had them backed into the water, where they were first well soaked and then scrubbed clean, after the defilement of driving out the neep muck. And then one of the first things, ordinarily, was to prepare for the usual journey to the Wells.

In the district where Johnny Gibb lived, they believed in the Walls, old and young of them. Elderly people, male and female, went to Macduff to benefit by the bracing effects of sea-bathing, combined with a course more or less rigorous of sea water taken internally, followed up by the mineral water of Tarlair; sturdy bairns were taken thither in troops for the cure of scabbit faces and sic like; youths and maidens, whose complaints seemed often not of a deadly nature, went to the Walls as they could contrive to get; Jamie Hogg went there for the benefit of his sair een; Peter Tough to mitigate the rheumatics; Mains of Yawal, when he had occasion to gae down throu on business, actually drove his square wooden-looking gig five miles out of his direct route in order that he might have the opportunity of merely once dookin at Macduff. He lows't the gig and put his horse in to rest and feed, and I recollect distinctly seeing his tall gaunt figure in bottle-green surtout, as, despising ceremony, he strode away straight down from the fisher town, or rather the ropery, through hillocks of slippery ware

and knoblick stanes till he found water enough to dook in ; and a tedious walk he had, for the tide was out. The *modus operandi* of Mains's dookin was, that he first laid aside his hat and the bottle-green surtout, and, by the aid of a good handful of sea-ware scrubbed the upper part of his person. He then resumed the hat and surtout, and divesting himself of the remaining part of his garments, completed the operation in the like fashion. The farm servants even were fain to follow the prevailing custom ; and this, their belief, had not been discouraged by the physician in ordinary, the elder Dr. Drogemweal. The doctor had a semi-military reputation, inasmuch as, when the first Bonaparte was disturbing people by threats of invading our Island and so on, the doctor had been attached to the local militia ; and he was wont to accompany the fencibles to Fraserburgh at the time of their annual drill. It was related of him how he would make the delinquent soldier drink a quart-bottle of sea water by way of punishment, believing that, while the thing had a penal effect, it also conserved the man's constitution. To his latest day, when a chap went to him for advice, he would prescribe twa unce o' salts, and, if the case were grave, would take out his lance and bleed him ; winding up by a general exhortation to go to the Wells the first opportunity. And thus, in the very year before that of which I am about to write, when Johnny Gibb went over to Pitmachie to fee a man, he encountered a stoot young folla, from the Upper Garioch, who would suit his purpose admirably well, but was determined to have sax poun ten of fee. Johnny offered sax poun and a shilling of arles, after much threepin, as his ultimatum. They tuggit and ruggit to no purpose, till at last a compromise was reached, and the bargain concluded, on the chap throwing in this stipulation, "Weel, weel, than, aw'll tak' the siller ; but ye maun gie's an ouk at the Walls aifter the neep seed."

Such was the repute of the Wells at Macduff in my day, but that is long ago ; and to me the modern Macduff is a place all but totally unknown.

"Come awa', noo ; come awa', an' nae loss the mornin',"

continued Johnny Gibb, in an impatient tone—patience was not Johnny's prime virtue,—when he had satisfied himself that the cart was properly packed and adjusted. His words were addressed, in the first place, to Mrs. Gibb, who had been hoverin' between the door and the kitchen for some time, one part of her thoughts resting on Johnny and the cart, and another on Jinse Deans, the servant girl, to whom she continued still to address another and another exhortation, to be sure "an' plot 'er milk dishes weel, in this byous weather; an' get the kye pitten oot ear'," so that they might "get a caller mou'fu', an' win in afore they ran a-heat;" to see that "the caufies warn a neglekit," and give due heed to sundry other matters that concerned the proper ongoing of the place during the absence of its mistress.

Mrs. Gibb was dressed in a home-made gray wincey gown, a very precisely made up and very well starched close mutch (they were old-fashioned people the Gibbs), and a tartan plaid that had been in the family for at least a generation. She was assisted into the cart with due ceremony, and with the help of a chair—Jinse, the trusty, bare-headed, bare-armed maid, handing up after her a reticule basket, crammed with provisions for consumption by the way, and a big blue umbrella.

"Faur's the lassie noo?" quoth Johnny.

"Ou, I gart 'er rin roun' the neuk o' the wood a flie syne, to Smiddyward, to see 'at Eppie was up, and nae keep's wytin."

"That'll dee. Go on, Jess," and Johnny pulled the whip from the britchen as he spoke. "Ye may be leukin for me hame afore sindoon the morn's nicht."

"Weel, weel, tak' care o' yersel's," replied Tam Meerison, as he turned leisurely away to complete his stable operations, and tie his points, before he and the servant loon, who was not yet out of bed, should call on Jinse for their pottage.

I have not yet described Johnny Gibb's personal appearance, and, if the reader in the least cares to know, let me say that he was a short, thick-set man, or mannie rather,

with broad, sun-tanned countenance, whereof the shaggy eyebrows, and somewhat large, but well-set mouth, were not the least prominent features. He was slightly bow-legged, which rather added to the stability of his appearance; his dress was blue home-spun, crowned with a blue bonnet, for though Johnny was not a man who would altogether ignore the deference due to the conventionalities of society, he averred "that hats is a perfect mertyreessin to the heid, oonless them 't's wearin' them daily day." And so it came to pass that, except on the occasion of a funeral, or the Communion Sunday, Johnny's hat was seldom to be seen. And my private opinion is that, even on these occasions, it had been better left in its usual limbo. It was such an uncouthly shaped, brown, and hairy structure, that Johnny was hardly recognisable under it; he certainly looked much better and more gatefarrin in his blue bonnet.

As Johnny strode stoutly on alongside of his bonny bay mare, Jess, ilka blade o' grass tipped with its ain drap o' dew, and the orient sun just beginning to struggle through masses of gray cloud, and to gild the tree tops with occasional glimpses of his face, while the lark poured forth his song overhead in streams of rich melody, and a stray hare now and then hirpled up the dykeside—the scene was, undoubtedly, one fresh enough, and lovely enough to stir the blood of any but the most mouldy and ungrateful of human beings.

Round the corner of the wood from Gushetneuk, and a little beyond where a trotting burnie came down the hollow, there stood a small hamlet, consisting of about half-a-dozen unpretending edifices, scattered here and there, and including the smith's and shoemaker's places of abode and workshops, with an old-fashioned toon loan fringed by a few large ash and plane trees. At the top of the loan there was a very rustic-looking schoolhouse, and one or two small rape-thackit cottages. This was Smiddyward. By the roadside here, there stood waiting the arrival of the cart, Eppie Will, a widow 'oman, and friend of Mrs. Gibb, and her only son, Jock, a fite-heidet youth of fourteen or thereby,

tender eyed, with a bandage round his head longitudinally, and tightly encased from head to foot in a suit of gray moleskin, garnished with abundance of brass buttons. With them stood a girl of about Jock's age, dressed almost as quaintly as Jock, though with feminine tact, she had set off her primitive gingham frock for the occasion with a fresh nosegay pinned in the front. In point of physical features, too, she had the advantage of him. In contrast to Jock's rather flabby face and sheepish look, "the lassie," as Johnny and Mrs. Gibb invariably called her, had a face which, though somewhat high in point of colour, possessed that regularity of feature and pleasantness of contour, which, in a different rank of life, would have been held to give promise of ultimately maturing into unmistakable womanly beauty. The lassie, whose name was Mary Howie, was the niece of Mrs. Gibb; and being the daughter of parents whose poverty, if not their wills, could very well consent to spare her, she had become, in a sort, the adopted child of the Gibbs, who had no family of their own.

Johnny Gibb stopped Jess, got the whole hypothee into the cart; and then, mounting the forebreist himself, started again, fairly under way for the Wells.

*- Stop of S. Wells
- Then follow to Hb. man.*



12

The Black Bull Inn

