

CHAPTER XXX.

MEG RAFFAN ENTERTAINS DAWVID HADDEN.

To say that Mrs. Peter Birse was a careful and far-seeing matron is perhaps hardly necessary at this stage of affairs. Her capacity for management was felt to some extent in connection with the Free Kirk congregation of Pyketillim, for had she not once and again got the dog-cart sent from Clinkstyle to bring forward the preacher when they had only chance "supply;" had not certain of the supplies obtained been privileged to pass a night or more under her roof; and now that the congregation had the stated services of a promising and well-favoured young probationer, the Rev. Nathaniel MacCassock, was not Miss Birse, with the concurrence of her sagacious mother, the first to come forward and give her aid as a zealous lady collector? Mrs. Birse made much of Mr. MacCassock, the probationer, and failed not, as she felt moved thereto, to remind the people that they were highly privileged in having amongst them a man of such gifts. But it was in the more private or domestic phase of her life that Mrs. Birse's talent for diplomacy was best seen. It is known to the attentive reader, that she had some years ago contemplated a very judicious arrangement for the establishment in life of her eldest son, Peter, and, as subsidiary to that, the virtual retirement from active life of herself and her husband. The plan involved, too, the retirement of Johnny Gibb from his possession at Gushetneuk. And now that Johnny's lease was about to expire, the time to carry out the scheme was at hand.

So thought the goodwife of Clinkstyle, and she considered it right to take measures accordingly.

A little before the Lammas rent time, Meg Raffan had once again the pleasure of drinking a quiet cup of tea with Mrs. Birse, and on the evening of the day when the rents were intimated as payable, Dawvid Hadden, as he passed on his way homeward, found Meg's hospitality so cordial and pressing that, before he well knew what he was about, he occupied the rather unwonted position of guest to the henwife, sitting in the arm-chair in the farthest ben corner of her house, while Meg busied herself in ministering to his physical comfort.

"Yer health aw wuss, Dawvid," said Meg, when she had emptied a bottle of reaming home-brewed ale into a couple of tumblers, whereof she lifted one in her hand, having set the other handy for Dawvid Hadden; "aw'm richt glaid to see ye. I'm seer ye hinna faul't yer fit i' my hoose this towmon," continued the henwife.

"Weel, it's but seldom that I gae ony gate cep faur buzness tak's me. Yer vera good health, Mrs. Raffan, an' luck to the fools. N-ay!" quoth Dawvid, after a goodly pull at the ale; "that's worth ca'in' ale—that gars a body's lugs crack."

"Weel, ye see, I can nedder dee wi' a jilp o' treacle bree, nor yet wi' that brewery stuff that some fowk mak's eese o'. There's naething like a starn gweed maut, maskit i' yer nain bowie, an' a bunchie o' wormit to gi'e 't a bit grip—tak' oot yer drap noo. Aw'm seer ye maun be thristy as weel's tir't toitin aboot amo' that rent fowk a' day. Ye raelly wud need a bit shalt to cairry you no."

"It's nae little traivel that tak's a body owre the grun, I'se asseer ye," said Dawvid. "I've nae fyouer nor twa-an'-foorty entimations to gi'e ilka time."

"Eh, ay; that's weel min'et," replied the henwife, "an' foo mony o' yer tacks rins oot at this turn?"

"Lat me see—a'thegither there's only about half-a-dizen, encloodin' Hairry Muggart's craft an' the smith's an' souter's."

“ Dear me, aw thocht the crafts hedna tacks, but jist gaed on superannuat like ?”

“ Ay, but that’s oon’er nae lethal obligation,” answered Dawvid, drily.

“ An’ fat ’ll ye be deein wi’ the bodie Gibb’s placie at Gushetneuk ?” pursued Meg. “ It’s oot, aw b’lieve.”

“ Weel, I hinna jist leuket at the maitter vera particular yet, I’ve hed so muckle on han’. But an the crap war aff o’ the grun, I’ll need ’a be at the road wi’ the chyne to mizzour aff some o’ that bits o’ places, an’ lat Sir Simon ken fat to dee.”

“ It’s sic a noughty little bit haudin’. Sudna ye jist pit it tee to the like o’ Clinkstyle, an’ mak’ a richt fairm at ance ?”

“ Weel, ov coorse there ’ll be a cheenge at it at ony rate—but there’s a fyoun year o’ Clinkstyle to rin yet ; an’ fat eese wud Peter Birse hae for mair grun ? The man’s lang past’s best.”

“ Keep me, Dawvid, ye’re foryettin that he has twa strappin’ lads o’ sins at hame.”

“ Ou, weel, lat them leuk oot some ither gate. To tell the trowth, Meg, though I ees’t to think Peter Birse a saft, weel-dispos’t breet—an’ wud ’a been owre bye to hae a newse wi’ ’im ilka ither gloamin—that wife o’ his has sic a swye owre ’im an’ ’s so contermin’t, that I hinna been naar the place for years, cep fan my buzness tyeuk me.”

“ Na, Dawvid, to hear ye say’t !” exclaimed Meg Raffan, shaking her head with much solemnity. “ That’s the wye that ill-will begins. Dear me ; didna I jist hear her the tither nicht oot o’ ’er nain mou’ speakin’ about you, and remorsin sair that they sud never see ye owre bye. ‘ Ay,’ says she, ‘ he’s a richt able creatur, Maister Hadden, an’ a richt humoursome. There’s fyoun o’ yer beuk-leern’t fowk like him,’ says she. An’ fa’s a better jeedge, Dawvid, nor Mrs. Birse—ye winna say that black’s the fite o’ *her* e’e.”

“ Ou weel,” said Dawvid, whose vanity was visibly flattered, “ I never hed nae ill-wull at the ’oman. But ye ken foo they gaed on aboot that non-intrusion—— ”

“Hoot, Dawvid, fowk sudna keep up um’rage. ‘Them that buys beef buys banes,’ as the aul’ by-word says.”

“Ou ay; but I’m perfectly seer Sir Simon’ll gi’e nae fawvour to nane o’ that Free Kirk fowk. Ye ken foo he order’t that creatur Peterkin to be turn’t aff, ’t ’s been gaen about like a supplicant sin’ syne; an’ there’s severals’ll hae to gae yet; lat me tell ye that; or than my name’s nae Hadden.”

“Hear ye me, Dawvid Hadden,” said the henwife, with the air of one who has something important to communicate, and drawing a little nearer as she spoke. “Ye maunna lat licht that I taul ye. But it’s true that ye say that Peter Birse’s growin’ an aul’ fail’t stock. Noo, Mrs. Birse mintit to me as muckle’s that they sud be thinkin’ o’ gi’en owre the place to the aul’est sin, Peter—yon stoot chap, wi’ the fite fuskers—an’ themsel’s gyaun to some lesser wye o’ deein, or a genteel hoose wi’ a bit craft, for easedom i’ their aul’ age. ‘Awat, fat needs fowk forfecht themsel’s fan they hae plenty?’ says she. An’ for that maitter, the sin’s nae a Free Kirker ava.”

“Ou nae!” exclaimed Dawvid, incredulously.

“Na, weel-a-wat no. He’s never been a commeenicant at nae kirk, though the Miss is a gryte Non, an’ ’s said to be weel on wi’ that fair-hair’t chappie, MacCassock, that preaches to them.”

“Ou yea; a bonny bargain the like o’ ’im wud be. Better till ’er tak’ ane o’ ’er fader’s pleughmen.”

“Weel, weel, Dawvid. Ye ken ‘an ’oman’s wut’s in her foreheid,’” said Meg, jocularly. “Ye maunna be owre hard on ’s; we’re a’ feelish mair or less fan men fowk comes i’ the wye;” and Meg bridled up like any other interesting female.

When Dawvid Hadden had left for his home, Meg Raffan thought with herself that she had succeeded in serving the ends of her friend, Mrs. Birse, pretty fairly. She had not, perhaps, convinced Dawvid of the propriety of attaching the possession of Gushetneuk to the farm of Clinkstyle, but she had a shrewd notion that she had

brought Dawvid into that state of mind in which he was not unlikely to yield himself to the furtherance of Mrs. Birse's design so soon as that astute matron might have opportunity of more directly operating upon him, and that she would in due season find such opportunity there was not the least reason to doubt.

Meanwhile, Johnny Gibb plodded on in his wonted style, unconscious of the arrangement that was in contemplation to relieve him from the cares of active life as farmer of Gushetneuk.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE ELECTION OF ELDERS.

WHEN the Free Kirk congregation of Pyketillim had got in a measure consolidated, and had begun to think of calling a pastor, it was considered desirable to form a regular kirk-session, for hitherto they had merely had the services of two elders as occasion required, one of these being the souter, Roderick M'Aul, who had been ordained at a bygone time before he came to Pyketillim, and whose "orders" had quite safely been accepted as "indelible," and another elder belonging to a neighbouring parish, who had turned Free Churchman. So Mr. MacCassock, the probationer, exchanged pulpits for a Sunday with the moderator of the Free Presbytery, who read "the edict" for the election of three new elders and five deacons, and invited the congregation to meet on the succeeding evening to nominate fit and proper persons.

The election was a new experience in the quarter, and it caused a good deal of speculation. Jonathan Tawse declared that it would be a very ludicrous farce if it were not that the thing so nearly bordered on profanity, and his friend, Dr. Drogemweal, swore at this aspect of it even in presence of the Rev. Mr. Sleekaboot, under whose hospitable roof the two friends were at the time. Nevertheless, there was a goodly turn-out of the congregation at the nomination meeting, females as well as males. Mrs. Birse was there, and Peter Birse senior along with her. There had evidently

been some pains bestowed on Peter's toilet; he was arrayed in what was understood to be ecclesiastical black, and, in particular, the upper part of his person was uncommonly carefully done up, with a shirt "neck" of formidable dimensions and stiffness threatening his ears, and his hair combed into a sort of clerical flatness very different from its ordinary ragged state. The only other member of the Clinkstyle family present was the second son, Rob Birse, who has simply been mentioned in this history previously. Indeed, it would be difficult to say anything more of Rob than simply mention his existence. He was a lad who was content to vegetate on in an entirely undemonstrative way at Clinkstyle—a sort of new and somewhat duller edition of his father, so far as he had hitherto exhibited any character whatever. He was rarely stirred into anything like mental activity, except it might be through the aggressive action of his mother and sister. It was by their orders that he came to the congregational meeting, grumbling somewhat at the hardship of being obliged to do so.

Mrs. Birse maintained a demonstratively devout attitude during the opening exercises. She and her husband sat in a pew well to the front, and behind them sat Hairry Muggart—who had come up to the meeting in their company—and the mole-catcher.

The Moderator, in opening the business, pointed out the duties required of the elders, and the qualities that fit a man for that office, and then asked the meeting to nominate such as they deemed suitable. Forthwith, the smith rose and nominated Johnny Gibb, then somebody nominated the smith himself, and both the nominations were duly seconded. Then there was a pause; and the Moderator invited further nominations of men of known piety and zeal, and of unblemished life, no matter how poor they might be, or how humble their station. Another pause; and Mrs. Birse sighed with impressive solemnity, and laid her head on one side. Then the mole-catcher started up, and with a preliminary "hem," said—"Maister Moderawtor, there's ane that I think't we canna pass owre fae eleckin to be an

el'yer. He's vera weel kent to a' here present; an' weel-wordy o' siccan a office though he's nae ane that wud pit 'imsel forrit. But my opingan is that he's been aye owre bauch in's nain beheef." (Here Mrs. Birse kicked Peter, who had been looking very uneasy, in the ribs with her elbow, making him sit upright and show himself.) "But ae wye or ither," pursued the mole-catcher, "though he hasna ta'en muckle direck pairt, he's been a great freen to the cause in this neebourheid." (Mrs. Birse modestly looked to the floor, and shook her head.) "Moderawtor, aw'm sure I needna mak' a speech, though aw cud dee't; ye a' ken Maister Peterkin as weel's me—I beg till propose Maister Alexir Peterkin."

At this announcement Mrs. Birse drew herself up with a severity approaching to violence, and Peter, who had kept watching her movements with the "tail" of his eye, looked more uncomfortable than before. The general audience signified their approbation of the mole-catcher's proposal, and Johnny Gibb starting to his feet said, "I sec-ond the motion."

Then there was another pause; and the Moderator reminded the meeting that though the number of elders absolutely required had now been nominated, yet it was quite open to anybody to propose one or more additional candidates; and he had no doubt there were other members of the congregation well qualified to discharge the duties of the eldership. Upon this, Hairry Muggart, who for some short space back had evidently been meditating a speech, swung himself to his feet by the aid of the pew desk, and said:—"Maister Moderawtor, I perfeckly agree wi' your opingan that there ocht to be ane or twa owre an' abeen, to wale amon'; or else fat's the eese o' the prenciples o' spiritooal oondependence, whuch I've aye mainteen't an' for whuch oor forefaders conten't? Moderawtor, I beg hereby to exerceede the preevilege wherewith you have inveetit every one present to be a partaker; an' in doin' so I have to bring one oonder the fawvourable attention o' this meetin'; for the vaeluable service render't to this congregation, which

speaks for itsel'; an' also his excellent partner in life." Hairry, who had found it more difficult than he had expected to face his rather unsympathetic audience, and speak, ended abruptly with, "I will add no more at present, but muv that Maister Peter Birse, fairmer at Clinkstyle, be electit."

They waited a little, but nobody seconded. But the Moderator said this was not necessary; so the name of Peter Birse was added to the list of elders elect. The next business was to nominate deacons, which was speedily done, the name of Jock Will coming first, and that of the mole-catcher second in order; and in all some seven or eight, chiefly of the younger men, were named. When all this was done, the meeting was brought to a close in the usual way, after the Moderator had conducted another "exercise," in which the souter, who at his request took part, prayed earnestly that He who knew the hearts of all might show them which of these men He had chosen; and that there might be close dealing with conscience on the part of the elders elect, to make sure that the carnal man had no place in moving them toward this spiritual office.

"An' that's yer meetin' no!" exclaimed Mrs. Birse, addressing Hairry Muggart, who had kept as close by her as his ponderous style of locomotion would allow whilst the goodwife flung through the people as they loiteringly dispersed from the door of the place of meeting. "I wud like to ken fat kin' o' a moderawtor he is; or foo they sud 'a pitten him into Maister MacCassock's place. A man that kens nae ane there fae the orraest creatur i' the congregation!"

"Weel," said Hairry, "aw b'lieve they maun hae ane't 's been ordeent' to be moderawtor, accordin' to the rowles o' the Kirk. But he's nae gryte deykn at it, weel-a-wat."

"Humph! deykn at it! It was seerly his duty as a miniaister o' the gospel to warn them to leuk oot for fowk o' respectable character, instead o' gaen oot o' 's gate to tell them that they mith elect ony wil' ranegill, or ca'd about ne'er-do-weel, though he hinna three bawbees i' the wardle to bless 'imsel' wi'."

"Nae doot," said Hairry, "nae doot. But ye ken they're nae electit yet. Fan the votin' comes that'll turn the guise wi' them, or than I won'er at it. Ye see I hed it weel i' my min' till object to Sandy Peterkin, an' request the meetin' to exerceese the veto on 'im at ance. But, as I was sayin', fan *ye* cam' owre the streen i' the gloamin to see *her*, an spak' aboot it, I hed my nain doots futher or no aw wud be latt'n nominat' Peter—Maister Birse, ye ken. An' it was jist as weel 't the moderawtor didna ken 't aw wasna a regular maimber; but gin I hed latt'n at Sandy, Gushets or the souter wud 'a been seer to hae their horn i' my hip, an' they mith 'a refees't 's a hearin' a'thegither syne, ye see."

"Weel, seerly Gushetneuk mith 'a latt'n aleen there no; fan he hedna the menners to apen 's mou' for 's nearest neebour nor nane belangin' 'im—fowk't 's lickly to be near connectit wi' 'imself—I kenna fat he hed adee speakin' for ony ane."

"I thocht Gushets unco dry the nicht," replied Hairry.

"An' a bonny smiddy they wud mak' o' 't," continued Mrs. Birse. "Mak' an el'yer o' the like o' Sandy Peterkin, 't 's livin' fae han' to mou' o' the wull o' Providence, an' a deacon o' that peer simple vulgar creatur o' a mole-catcher; it's really nae fair to Maister MacCassock to bid 'im sit doon wi' the like o' them."

"Weel, no," said Hairry. "The like o' the merchan', Jock Wull, mith dee, but——"

"An' aw wud like to ken fat Jock Wull's deen to gi'e *him* ony preevilege," exclaimed Mrs. Birse. "Aw'm seer Gushetneuk kens weel that oor Robbie hed a muckle better richt to be nominat', oot o' regaird for fat's sister's deen. Peer thing, mony a sair fit has she traivell't for the gweed o' the Free Kirk, and that's fowk's thank."

Hairry could only express concurrence in this sentiment. But as he and Mrs. Birse had now reached the point where their roads separated, they pulled up to wait for Peter Birse senior, who had fallen some little way into the rear, he having actually stayed to converse for a minute or two with the mole-catcher and some of his friends. When he came

Harry Muzzart.



up, Hairry assumed the jocular vein, and begged to congratulate Peter on his personal appearance in his "stan' o' blacks," so very suitable to the new dignity that awaited him.

"Ah, aw dinna ken, Hairry," said Peter, glancing towards his wife. "The lave 's seer to be eleckit, an' Sandy Peterkin may aiven be pitten on afore me."

"Hoot, Clinkies, that winna bide a hearin', man," said Hairry, confidently.

"Blëss me, man, keep yer han's oot o' yer breek pouches ; dinna ye see 't yer rivin' that black claith doon the seam ? There 's naething would leern ye menners," said Mrs. Birse.

Peter withdrew his hands from the pockets of his ecclesiastical unmentionables accordingly. Then they bade each other good night, and went on their separate ways homewards.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DAWVID HADDEN VISITS AT CLINKSTYLE.

IN the autumn of 1846 Dawvid Hadden was laboriously at work on certain parts of the lands of Sir Simon Frissal, with his measuring chain and sundry poles, one of which had a small bit of square board nailed on the top of it. A rough-looking gurk ov a loon carried the end of the chain, and fulfilled Dawvid's orders in running here and there as Dawvid took a sight over the square-headed pole, and then shouted and waved his hand to the loon. This process was what Dawvid called "layin' aff the awres." The results, it was understood, were all to be laid before Sir Simon; but in what particular shape it might be hazardous to guess, for there is reason to believe that Dawvid could do nothing whatever in the way of making a plan, and though he was great at "castin up" the contents of a piece of land, that operation did not seem of very essential importance in the reletting of the farms, seeing Sir Simon had their various sizes all carefully booked already. However, it was enough that Dawvid deemed the layin aff of consequence.

His operations at this time included, of course, the farm of Gushetneuk, and on the day that Dawvid was expected to be at work there, Mrs. Birse addressed her husband in this wise:—

"Noo, man, ye'll jist mak' an erran' owre bye to the smiddy, an' cast yersel' in Dawvid's road fan he's about the

heid o' the faul'ies; an' see an' get 'im to come owre edder till 's denner, or than afore he lowse."

"I was jist gyaun awa' to tirr that bit huickie that we wus takin' into the barn to thrash," said Peter, not over anxious to undertake the mission. "Cudnin some o' the boys gae?"

"Peter Birse, will ye dee's ye're bidden? A het invitation that wud be to ony ane ackin oon'er yer laird. Sen' a laddie, an' you gyaun aboot the toon the neist thing to han' idle!"

"Weel, gin Dawvid'll come. But we're nae needin' the smiddy. I was there the streen. I'll raither gae owre to Gushets wi' the probang that we hed the tither nicht fan the yalla feeder worriet on a neep. Aw'se warran' the fowk'll be needin' 't."

"Geyan lickly gae to Gushets! As muckle's ye wud gi'e Dawvid to oon'erstan' that we're as gryte's creel heids wi' them. Some eese o' seekin' 'im at that rate. Fan will ye leern rumgumption, man?"

Peter did not see it clearly even yet. Only he knew it was needless to maintain further debate. So he went away and searched out a hayfork that had got lamed of one prong, and started for the smiddy. It was only after he had been there and was on his way home again that he found Dawvid Hadden at a point where he could be conveniently approached. Rather to Peter's surprise, Dawvid proved to be affable in a high degree. Mrs. Birse could have given Peter a probable reason for this; but it was not to be expected that Mrs. Birse would feel it in the least necessary to do anything of the sort. Dawvid could not by any "menner o' means" come to Clinkstyle that day; for he had got to finish his layin' aff, and then go home and write Sir Simon; and he even hinted that that might not exhaust the buzness before him; but Peter was authorised to give Mrs. Birse assurance that he would be "athort the morn's gloamin," without fail.

Dawvid Hadden was essentially a man of his word in so far as fulfilment of his engagements was concerned, and

accordingly he duly made appearance at Clinkstyle as he had promised. I rather think that Mrs. Birse was not disappointed at his putting the visit off for a day. It gave her leisure to mature things more fully. It was just a fortnight after the meeting for the nomination of elders; the election had taken place in the *interim*, and Peter Birse senior had stood at the bottom of the poll. On this occasion (it was on a Wednesday evening) Peter, who had no clerical character now to maintain, had been instructed to wash his face and shave (which he sometimes did, if anything happened to be going, when the week was only half run), and then to put on his gray journey claes, and step up the loan and meet Dawvid. All this he did, and then he, with due ceremony, conducted the ground-officer round by the "entry" door and into the best parlour. The room in question was finished much in the usual style, the front wall carrying oil portraits of the master and mistress of the house, done at a former date by an itinerating artist, when Peter Birse was assumed to be a sprightly young man, given to sticking his hand into the breast of his black vest, and Mrs. Birse, a blushing beauty, who manipulated a rose in her slender fingers; the other pictorial decorations of the parlour were the framed print of a man who was either Sir William Wallace or Rob Roy, attitudinising with a sword and shield, and the traditional sampler. It was laid out for tea. An enormous old-fashioned urn, which lay under the disadvantage of leaking so badly as to compel its presence there to be purely ornamental, occupied the centre of the table, while the multiplicity of crockery of all sorts surrounding it was enough to bewilder any ordinary mortal. Mrs. Birse was dressed in her black silk, with a collar spreading over her shoulders, and a most formidable black lace cap, perfectly ablaze with branches of "gum-flowers" of very pronounced colours and uncertain botanical character. She met Dawvid Hadden at the half-opened parlour door with a gracious, yet not too familiar, "I howp yer weel the nicht, Maister Hadden. Jist leave yer hat i' the lobby an' step in—aloo me." When Dawvid had stepped in he *was*

a little taken aback, and would perhaps have felt slightly embarrassed, as Peter Birse, who had shuffled in at his heels, had stopped his discourse, and seemed to feel the need of walking gingerly till the introduction should be over; but Mrs. Birse came to the rescue.

“My daachter; Maister Hadden, an aul’ freen.”

Miss Eliza Birse, who had sat stiffly in the corner of the room till that moment, rose, and, with the air of a polished lady, bowed to Dawvid Hadden. “Glad to see you,” said Miss Birse.

Dawvid Hadden was not easily put out; but he did not expect all this, so much in advance of what he had been wont to see aforesaid at Clinkstyle; and by the time that he had been duly introduced to Miss Birse, and had got seated on the chair placed for him, he almost fancied that his face did manifest a slight tendency toward perspiration. Dawvid had not quite understood that he came there to tea, but tea was ordered in at once. The want of a bell to call the servant was a great defect in the appurtenances of the house at Clinkstyle, against which Miss Birse had repeatedly protested. Mrs. Birse’s device in lieu of the bell was to open the parlour door half-way, cough in an incidental sort of tone, and then shut the door with a sharp snap. To “cry ben” was so horribly vulgar that it could not be once thought of.

So the damsel brought the tea in a huge, ancient, china tea-pot. Miss Birse dispensed it with infinite grace, and Mrs. Birse showed no end of attentions to her guest. Even Peter Birse had latterly got to be demonstrative in that way, and urged Dawvid to take several more of the small biscuits, for the reason that “ane o’ that’s but a bite, man,” at the un-gentility of which saying Miss Birse looked shocked; only her father was too pleasantly occupied at the time to observe this very particularly.

When tea was over, Miss Birse, according to arrangement or otherwise, left the party, as she had to go and make some visits.

“Ye see she’s jist like yersel’ there, Maister Haddon—

though there be a gryte differ atween a man o' lang expairi-
ence an' a lassie—for she has aye some bizziness or anider
on han'. Oor youngest laddie, Benjie, 's been i' the toon,
's ye 've maybe heard, for several year?"

"I wusna awaar," said Dawvid.

"Ou ay; he's wi' a Maister Pettiphog, ane o' the heid
lawvyers o' Aiberdeen—I've nae doot ye'll ken him?"

"Weel, no, aw cud hardly say that—we're jist speak-
able acquaint."

"Aweel, at ony rate he's an aul' servan' o' my uncle's
that was the lawvyer, and has a braw bizziness o' 's nain
noo. An' Benjie's been wi' 'im for mair nor twa year,
lernin the law; an' aw'm seer aw canna but think that
he lippens owre muckle till sic a young creatur—actooally
vreetin o' dockiments an' fat they ca' progresses. Fat was
that't he said, man, fan we hed him and Mrs. Pettiphog oot
here veesitin for an ouk fernyear? Ou ay, says he, 'Lat
ye Maister Benjamin alone; it's a sharp client that'll tak'
mair nor the worth o' 's siller oot o' him.' Weel, as aw
was sayin', Maister Pettiphog hed gotten chairge o' that
peer breet An'ro Langchafts' maitters; an' ye wud raelly
won'er, Dawvid. An'ro hed len'it oot trifles here an there
't's nae paid till this day's date."

"Ye dinna mean siller o' 's nain?"

"So it wud appear; though a'budy thocht vera different.
An' fat does Maister Pettiphog dee, but get Benjie to write
oot here to mak' inquries."

"Ye see he thocht we mith'a kent something about it,"
observed Peter Birse.

"Noo dinna ye begin to speak aboot things 't ye ken
naething aboot, man," said Mrs. Birse. "Ye see, though we be
tellin' Maister Hadden, 't's sic an aul' freen, a' this, fat's deein
in a lawvyer's office mauna be claickit aboot to ilka body.
So 'Liza wudna pit aff nae langer, but jist vrote back to
Benjie the nicht, an' nae doot we'll hear mair aboot it."

Dawvid Hadden's curiosity, it must be owned, was not
a little aroused by the dose of information so judiciously
and skilfully administered by Mrs. Birse, and which seemed

to give good promise of something more yet to come. From the point now gained, the conversation flowed on easily and naturally to a discussion of the character and credit of the neighbourhood generally. Johnny Gibb came in for some notice, Mrs. Birse purposely letting fall the remark that Johnny had not treated them altogether in the way they were entitled to expect. "He's jist owre bitter no," said the goodwife, "an' I'm thinkin' that oor nain Patie's nae sae far wrang," added she, with a laugh. "It's a pity that he's nae at hame the nicht; but he's sic a bricht fairmer that he's aye o' the outleuk for bargains, an' he's awa' at the Hawkha' market, faur he bocht a byous chape coo fernyear, an' half-a-dizzen o' stirks—for he has af'en naar dooble the beasts 't oor boun's'll keep. Patie's a stainch Aul' Kirk man, ye ken, an' says he till's sister, 'Ah, Lizzie,' says he, 'the Free Kirk may dee for women creaturs, but ye needna think that mony men, at ony rate young chaps, wi' ony spunk i' them, wud thole yer psalmin' lang.' Peer 'Liza tyeuk it unco het, but fient a flee care't Patie."

When Mrs. Birse had repeated these sentiments of her son approvingly, Peter Birse senior brightened up, and showed some disposition to pursue the same line of thought on his own account, but his better half promptly and adroitly turned the conversation, and the rest of the evening was passed chiefly in the narration of examples of the prudence, sagacity, and administrative capability of Peter Birse junior, his father, Peter Birse senior, being freely used in illustration as a sort of foil to set off the young man's merits. At parting, Mrs. Birse ventured to say, "Weel, weel, Maister Hadden; it's a gryte feast to see you for an evenin'; an' ye maun come back shortly an' see Patie, for he's to be at ye to gi'e 'im mair grun noo, fan some o' yer tacks is oot. Him an' you can satl't atween ye. We sanna enterfere—aul' fowk, ye see, maun gae oot o' the gate o' the young. It's their pairt to be thinkin' aboot ither things."

"Aweel, I'll be thinkin' aboot the new arreengements, an' aw'll lat ye ken fat a's to be done vera shortly," said Dawvid Hadden.