

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE SETTIN' OF GUSHETNEUK.

It was an honourable feature in the policy of the Frissal family that within the memory of living man or woman no old tenant had ever been turned off the property. No matter that adverse fortune had overtaken a man, nor even that his own sloth or mismanagement had reduced him to straits; if unable to continue in his existing haudin, some smaller place, or at least a bield to put his head in, was found for him, and he was allowed to end his days with the centre of his wonted orbit as little disturbed as might be. Though Sir Simon had been from his youth upward what would have been rightly described as a "hard-up" laird, and though the more industrious of his tenants evidently made a very comfortable living, the rents remained easy, and no foreign influences had hitherto been permitted to inflame them. Perhaps the system had its drawbacks. I recollect one or two tenants, for example, of a type that could certainly never be developed under the more modern system, by which the lands, erstwhile of Sir Simon, as well as other properties, are now regulated. Their laziness and capability of mismanagement were positively of the nature of genius—at anyrate in so far as genius can achieve results without effort. Here was Ga'in Tamson now—Who could have told from Ga'in's pastures that Italian ryegrass was a plant known to the British farmer; or said with certainty from his green crop that the turnip was other than an exotic

of doubtful growth in our severe climate? In point of fact, Ga'in allowed a large screed oftener than once, to "lay" itself "out," without his troubling it with anything in the shape of clover or grass seeds; and he objected to "bone manure" on principle. His patches of corn bloomed a bright yellow with the ancient skellach, and the aspect of his kine and of his old "brown" mare did not belie the fare on which it was their fortune to be sustained. Ga'in was a "fine stock," with a fluent and compendious power of newsin; yet he got into difficulties, and latterly ceased to pay rent. But even Ga'in Tamson was not sent adrift. He merely roupit aff at Claybogs, and being transferred to a croft near by, placidly cultivated the same, or refrained from cultivating it, as he had a mind, for the remaining period of his life. Well; if Sir Simon's system had its drawbacks, I am not sure that the system which has succeeded it is quite faultless.

Anyhow, things being thus, the report that Johnny Gibb, the souter, and the smith were to be turned off, caused no little sensation in the neighbourhood, as the 25th October 1846, being the day of letting, approached.

"Na; but it's keerious no, that Dawvid sudna been owre bye ere this time to gi'e's the rinnins o' the maitter."

The speaker was Mrs. Birse, and she addressed her husband and her eldest son, Peter, when they had finished their breakfast on the morning in question.

"Hooever, he has sae mony things to deteen 'im; ye'll baith rank yersel's eenoo an' be ready in richt time to gae up to the Hoose."

"Fat wud be the eese o' that? we'll be in gweed time this twa 'oors," quoth Peter junior, rising and making his way towards the parlour door. "Aw'm gyaun awa' to lat oot the stirks an' ca' them to the Backhill, faur Mains's orra man's reddin oot the mairch stank, till aw see foo he's gettin' on."

"Noo, Patie, fat eese has the like o' you to be gyaun treeshin an' ca'in' aboot at nowte beasts eenoo?"

Peter went, however; and, as Mrs. Birse could do no

better, she called after him, "Min', noo, and nae bide owre lang. Ye ken Sir Seemon's vera punctooal, an's nain words to Dawvid wus to bid 'every one be there by twel' o'clock.'—Na, man, but aw mitha bidden *you* pit on yer claith breeks i' the mornin'! There ye hae them skaikit wi' skirps o' sharn bree to the vera waistban'."

"Hoot, 'oman, it's neathing o' the kin'; ye ken they've hed that marks o' them this three towmons," and Peter Birse senior wetted his thumb and proceeded to rub at certain spots on the rather shrivelled-looking rusty-black unmentionables in which the lower part of his person was enclosed.

"Noo, min' yer nae to gae throu' yer gremmar gin Sir Seemon speer onything about the Free Kirk at ye, fan ye're sattlin about Gushetneuk; as it's nait'ral that he will."

"Weel, gin he speer, aw maun jist tell 'im the trowth; ye ken brawly that I never was a weel-wuller till gyaun awa' fae the Pairis' Kirk."

"There's mair wyes o' tellin' the trowth nor ane, man; ye're seerly aul' aneuch to ken that ere noo. Sir Seemon kens fae ithers nor you that Maister MacCassock's come o' genteel, respectable, weel-livin' fowk, an' that he's vera intimat' in oor faimily. An' gin he speer about ony ither transack that there's been, there's nae occasion for you to say ocht or flee, but jist, 'Weel, Sir Seemon, the best wye's joost to refar ye to yer nown awgent, Maister Hadden.'"

"But foo sud aw dee that?"

"Foo sud ye dee that! Foo sudna ye dee't fan yer bidden?"

"Dawvid hisna naething adee wi't."

"An' fat for hisna Dawvid naething adee wi't? He gya *you* a braw fleg about it af'ener nor ance. Jist hear ye fat I say—'It wusna for naething that the cat licket the stane,' 's the fowk says; an' aw think it wud be ill Dawvid Hadden's pairt nae to dee a' that he cud for them that's coontenanc't him as we've deen."

"Hoot, but ye lippen owre muckle to Dawvid," argued Peter; but Mrs. Birse, who had begun to give her atten-

tion to some household matters, did not think it worth while to keep up the discussion, knowing, as she did, that though Peter was disposed to regard the occasion as one on which he might not inopportunistically remind Mrs. Birse, in a friendly way, of his own safe instincts in matters ecclesiastical, he would undoubtedly fall in with, and act according to his instructions.

In due course, Messrs. Birse, senior and junior, set forth on their important errand. I rather think there had been some slight qualms of conscience in the case of the former; else he need not have proposed to his son that, in place of taking the straight road, they should go along the dykeside through the field, and round by the Backhill, so as to steer quite clear of Gushetneuk. At any rate, they reached the precincts of the great house in good time. Then they were puzzled somewhat. The prefatorial part, as it were, had been solely intrusted to Dawvid Hadden, and Dawvid they had not seen; and notwithstanding they had hung about where it seemed likely they might catch the vigilant ground-officer's eye, there had been no sign of his appearing. So they would go past his house. Oh! that very morning Dawvid had had to leave post haste for "doon throu'," on business of Sir Simon's. There was nothing for it then but walk up to the Hoose alone. And when they had done so the butler told them that Sir Simon and Mr. Greenspex had been going on for a while.

"The parson's been here, no less, for the last half-hour," quoth the functionary aforesaid.

"We wus expeckin to see Dawvid Hadden; will there be any chance o's bein' in aboot shortly?" asked Peter Birse senior.

"Davie?" said the butler. "Not if he's a wise man; there's been a awful kick-up about some promise he had made to his reverence to give the smith's croft to a *prodigee* of his."

"Raelly!" answered Peter.

"And the upshot's like to be to unship poor Muggart."

"Eh, fat wye, man?"

"Well, you see," said the butler, who was a not much less important official in his own way than Dawvid Hadden,—"so far as I gather, Sir Simon, at the preliminary audience last night, settled to give both the smith and shoemaker their crofts—so I gathered from the conversation of the agent when we had a glass of wine together. Sir Simon put on his most severest look—and he can do it in style—when he heckled them about the Free Church. But, as you Scotch say, he gave them 'the bit and the buffet with it'—and quite right, quite right, they're both very good tradesmen. Ah! but his reverence comes up with this *prodigee* of his; a parson's not to be denied, you know; besides, Sir Simon was very angry at Muggart for making such a botch of that new gate at the bottom of the lawn; and I gather that Hairry's to get the sack to make way for this person."

"Isnin that byous!" said Peter Birse senior. "Ye see we cam' up aboot Gushetneuk."

"Gushetnook! what about it?" said the butler.

"Weel, we wus thinkin' o' takin' *it* tee to oor pairt for *him* here;" and Clinkstyle canted his hat half-way over in the direction of his son.

"Takin' Gushetnook! Bless your 'art, didn't you hear that it's took already? Old Gibb was here last night; sich a row wi' Sir Simon and he; might 'a heard them half-way down the lawn—not Sir Simon, of course, he's too much of a gentleman to speak loud. But Gushetnook's let—not to old Gibb, mind ye, but to some friend o' his, I didn't gather who. Excuse me, gentlemen," continued the butler, who was also discharging the office of footman. "His reverence is just going."

The butler went to open the door, and Peter Birse senior looked at Peter Birse junior uneasily.

"Nyod, I dinna think't we sud bide langer, laddie."

"Please yersel," said Peter Birse junior. "Fat'll my mither say to ye, gin ye gae hame onseen the laird?"

"We canna be nae better o' seein' 'im noo, fan it's ta'en oot amo' oor vera fingers."

"This way, gentlemen—leave your hats," said the butler, returning with a pompous swing.

"Weel, we wusna thinkin' o' tribblin' Sir Seemon aifter fat ye've taul's," said Peter Birse senior.

"I've announced you—please don't keep Sir Simon waiting," was the response, uttered with some sharpness.

So the Messrs. Birse were ushered into the presence of Sir Simon Frissal and Mr. Greenspex. The interview was not a long one, yet Peter Birse senior, I am sure, could have honestly said he did not want it further protracted. He had only endeavoured to perform his "boo," in answer to Sir Simon's "Well, Birse, what do you wish?" and got a sentence or two muttered to the effect that "We wus gaen to speer aifter Gushetneuk," when the lawyer interposed, "Oh, yes, yes; supposing that it might be in the market. Very natural. Anything about your own farm? No; that's right. Well, I suppose this finishes—allow me"—and Mr. Greenspex opened the door to give him the opportunity of whispering to Peter Birse, "That's another piece of Dawvid Hadden's han'iwork, I presume. Oh, Dawvid, Dawvid! Ye may thank your stars that I've ta'en you oot without wakenin' the old gentleman's wrath again. Good day."

When the tenant of Clinkstyle and his son left the Hoose, after a voluble good-bye from their friend the butler, there was an aspect of considerable blankness on both their faces; and had the senior of the two been asked at that moment in what shape he was to report proceedings to his wife, I do believe that he would have been a good deal at a loss for a reply.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### CLINKSTYLE AGAIN.

As Messrs. Birse, senior and junior, pursued their way homeward to Clinkstyle, the conversation between them could hardly be described as animated. The elder Peter moralised in his own way on the "keeriousness" of the whole thing: how it should have come about that Dawvid Hadden's plan so elaborately got up should have gone for nothing; how Dawvid himself should have been to seek of all times at the very time that the possessions which he had so laboriously laid out were a-letting; and how, above all things, Gushetneuk could have been let to any friend of Johnny Gibb—a man of such unconstitutional opinions. Peter junior was not less sulky than his wont in addressing his father; so he merely said—

"Humph! ye was near as ill's him yersel'."

"Ou na, Peter, man, I never votit against the laird," said Peter Birse senior.

"Hoot, that's lang syne; an' aw'm seer ye jist conter't 'im as muckle aboot the kirk, though ye dinna mak' oot to be pitten on for a Free Kirk el'yer."

"Weel, Peter, it was maybe as lucky for's a' 't yer mither didna get 'er nain gate there. It's cost me mony an 'oor's sleep that wark."

"Ye'll needa get a pairt till's some wye at ony rate," said Peter Birse junior.

"A pairt? Ye ken ye'll get oor nain pairt in coorse

but it wud 'a made a hantle better a place gin Dawvid's plan hed been carrie't oot—There wud 'a been richt scouth for the sax shift gin we hed hed a swype across a' the braes, an' doon to the burn side yon'er."

"That's nae fat I'm speakin' aboot, ony wye."

"Ou, weel, ye ken, your name'll be in'o the neist tack o' Clinkstyle; and that's only four year come the time."

"Ye needna think that I'll wyte the half o' that time," replied the amiable Peter junior.

Peter Birse senior looked at his son inquiringly. He would have liked to get at the young man's mind with a little more of definiteness; but was far from clear about the proper method of reaching that end. The thought, however, occurred to him that if Johnny Gibb himself was to leave Gushetneuk, the lassie, Mary Howie, Peter's future wife, would have to leave it too, and naturally enough Peter's chivalrous nature might lead him to desire that his marriage and settlement in life should be then, so that Mary might be saved the hardship of going to the frem't, which had been hinted at in a quarter not unknown to Peter, as a possibility. Peter Birse senior regarded this conception of his brain as an unusually happy inspiration; and he answered with spirit—

"Weel, weel, Patie, man, we'll see fat yer mither says; only I wud *not* like to be chaumer't up in a toon.—Eh, man—fa'll that be gyaun aboot wi' Gushets there at the back faul'ies?" and Peter Birse senior put his hand over his brow to get a better view of three figures who were discernible in one of Johnny Gibb's fields.

"Fa cud ken fowk mair nor half a mile awa'?" inquired Peter Birse junior.

"Weel, but I'll waager something it's that mannie fae Marnoch—an e o' them—wud he hae onything adee wi' the takin' o' the place?"

"Lickly aneuch. Fat ither wud he be wuntin here, trailin' a' the road fae that."

"Fa *cud* that tither ane be ava'?" said Peter Birse senior, stopping to fix his eyes as steadily as possible on the



objects of his scrutiny. In this his example was followed by Peter Birse junior, who incontinently exclaimed, with a sort of sneer, "Hah! it's Willy M'Aul, the souter's sin. He's doon here eenoo, an' preten's till hae leern't fairmin' at some o' that muckle places 't he's been sairin' about."

"An' wud this new man raelly be takin' 's advice b' wye o'?" queried Peter Birse senior.

The father and son passed on, till Clinkstyle was full in view, when the former suggested—

"Nyod, Peter, ye mith jist gae in aboot, an' tell yer mither siclike speed's we've come; an' aw'll gae roon an' see Hairry Muggart, peer stock; he's lickly heard some sleumin o' fa it is that *has* raelly gotten Gushetneuk—tell 'er 't aw'll be hame in nae time."

There is no reason to doubt that Peter Birse senior looked upon this as a happy mode, so far as he was concerned, of getting the news broken to Mrs. Birse.

When Peter Birse junior had reached home he was met at the door by his mamma, who was in the mood described as "vokie."

"Weel, Newtoon," exclaimed Mrs. Birse, with affable jocularly, "fat's the rent o' yer fairm no?"

"Stoit, mither; fat needs ye aye gae on that gate?" answered Peter Birse junior, with some emphasis.

"Noo, noo, Patie, that winna dee to be so short i' the trot. Gin ance ye war mairriet, an' hed a muckle chairge o' yer heid, as ye'll seen hae, ye'll need 'a leern to hae mair patience wi' fowk."

"Weel, aw hinna gotten Gushetneuk, ony wye."

"Hinna gotten't! Fat d'ye mean?"

"It's ta'en till some freen' o' Gushets's nain."

"Freen o' Gushets's nain! Fat wye o' the face o' the wardle's earth's that? Did yer fader speak in a discreet menner till Sir Seemon?"

"He didna say hardly naething ava."

"Tchuck-tchuck! Was ever an 'oman triet this gate? I mitha socht till arreenge things an' expeck that he wudna ca't a' to the gowff i' the hin'er en'! Faur is he?"

Peter Birse junior had just answered this question, and informed his mother of the position Hairry Muggart stood in, when that gentleman and Mr. Birse senior passed the window outside. As they came in, Peter Birse junior stalked away out to attend to his "beasts," merely remarking to Hairry Muggart, "Weel, Hairry, aw b'lieve ye're oot o' the craftie."

A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind, 'tis said; and it so happened that while Peter Birse senior was on his way to seek out Hairry Muggart for the purpose of mutual condolence, Hairry was pursuing his way to Clinkstyle with the like object in view; and so they had met midway.

"Come awa', Maister Muggart, aw'm vera glaid to see ye—foo's yer goodwife the nicht?" said Mrs. Birse.

"Thank ye, muckle about the ordinar'," said Hairry.

"Isna this fine apen weather?"

"Raelly, it is so."

"It lats fowk get the young beasts keepit thereoot; an' that's an unco hainin o' the strae at the beginnin' o' the sizzon." After a pause, during which Hairry sat in a pensive attitude with his hands on his knees, Mrs. Birse went on in a calm and cheerful tone, "Ay; an fat's the news about your gate en', no?"

"Nae muckle't's gweed," said Hairry. "There's some o' 's gettin' the bag, aw b'lieve."

"Eh!" exclaimed Mrs. Birse, "an wusnin Patie jist tellin' me something that he hed heard aboot that—aw never was mair vex't i' my life nor to hear't ye was to be oot o' yer craft."

"We've a' been—sair't oot o' the same caup—" Peter Birse was about to say, in a half dolorous tone; but Mrs. Birse, by a glance which Peter sufficiently comprehended, checked the sentence, and herself went on—

"Raelly, Maister Muggart, it's a heemlin thing to think fat wye fowk sud be pitten upon in sic a menner. There was that bodie Hadden trailin' here ilka ither nicht aboot the time't they were plannin' oot the grun; an' he never haltit till *he* sud say that we would be willin' to tak' tee

Gushetneuk till oor place. Aw b'lieve I begood funnin' wi' 'im aboot it mysel' first—fowk wud needa tak' care o' the frivolousest word that they speak to the like o' 'im, weel-a-wat. Aweel, this fares on, till Dawvid sud come here an' tell *them* that Sir Seemon hed sattl't to gi'e them't; an' disna they gae up to the Hoose the day; but my lad's awa' fae hame, an' nae a cheep aboot Gushetneuk."

"Weel," said Hairry, "I never thocht Dawvid Hadden a man o' prenciple, but aw did not expeck this o' 'im."

"Ah, weel," replied the goodwife, "it was only *their* traivel. Forbid 't it sud be said that we socht to pit ony ane oot o' their pairt."

"But Gushets is lea'in 't ony wye," said Peter Birse senior.

"Ay," added Hairry, "that's the keerious pairt o' 't. Depen' ye upon 't there's been mair joukry-pawkry wi' Dawvid nor ye're awaar o'."

"An' fa's gettin' 't syne?" asked the goodwife.

"Weel," answered Hairry, "some say it'll be that mannie 't's been wi' them fae Marnoch. I cudna say."

"Fat ither," said Mrs. Birse, with a complacent nod. "Ah, weel, weel, I'll hae a craw to pluck wi' Maister Hadden for this, noo. Trystin' fowk to tak' s places to fawvour him, an' syne lea'in them wuntin hae or haud-again." She said this with a forced laugh; and then recollecting the impropriety of merriment in Hairry's depressed circumstances, she continued, "But aw'm richt sorry, Hairry, man, to think aboot sic a gweed neebour's yersel' bein' pitten aboot—fa's been hertless aneuch to tak' your craft owre yer heid?"

"Some ane't the minaster recommen't, we wus taul," blurted out Peter Birse senior, without reflecting on the implications of the remark.

"Ou ay!" said Mrs. Birse in an impressive tone. "This wordle has an unco haud faur there's an Erastian speerit."

Neither Hairry nor Peter Birse senior had any observation to offer on this statement of a principle; and the

interview ended with little beyond a general condemnation of Dawvid Hadden, whose conduct it was unanimously agreed called loudly for explanation.

Peter Birse junior had gone away in the gloamin to discuss the question with his old friend the red-haired orra man, at this time in service at Mains of Yawal; and his doubts about the new tenant of Gushetneuk were solved forthwith.

"Gosh-be-here, man," said the red-haired orra man, "Tam Meerison taul hiz the streen that it was ta'en to the chap M'Aul—ye mitha been seer he wasna there for naething."

"Dozen 't, min, I never thocht o' that," said Peter Birse junior. "Fat ither but that's fesh'n 'im here? But the like o' 'im 'll never be able to pay the inveetor, forbye to pit a cover upo' the place."

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### MEG RAFFAN GOES TO THE SHOP.

“DAWVID HADDEN—Fat’s come o’ ’im, said ye? Ou, didna ye hear that Dawvid’s been a perfect laimiter wi’ a sair fit, sin ever the day that the taçks wus settin’?”

It was Meg Raffan who spoke. She had gone across to the Kirktown to do some needful business at the shop, and was in conversation with Sandy Peterkin, who had asked how it came to pass that Dawvid, who was wont to be a frequent caller, had not been seen there for over a week.

“That’s nae sae gweed,” said Sandy. “Fat’s come owre’s fit? naething sairious, I houps?”

“Dear only kens,” answered Meg; “aw sudna won’er nor it’ll be a fit till ’im a’ ’s days!”

“Hoot, fye!”

“Ou ay!” answered the waggish henwife. “But fat better cud ye expeck? Fat’s this that you Free Kirk fowk’s been deein till ’im, aifter he hed ye a’ pitten oot o’ the lan’?”

“Weel,” said Sandy, “he ettl’t sair to get some o’ ’s awa’. But aw’m seer I wuss ’im weel.”

“The mair credit to ye, Sandy, man. But, weel-a-wat, it sair’t ’im richt, puchil, upsettin’ smatchet, ’t things sud gae the gate ’t they’ve gane.”

“Was’t a hurt; or fat?”

“Auch! A hurt or than no! Gin a’ bools hed row’t richt wi’ ’im we wud ’a never heard a word o’ a’ this

scronach about a strain't queet, an' him nae able to gae fae hame."

"We wus missin' 'im, ye see; he af'en calls for the letters, fan the dog-dirder chappie's occupiet," said Sandy Peterkin.

"Ay, ay; but ye see gin he cam' this len'th he beed 'a be thocht unco saucy gin he didna ca' on 's freen's at Clink-style i' the bye gaein," said Meg, with a cackling laugh. "An' Mrs. Birse mithna be jist sae couthy eenoo's gin Dawvid's gryte promises hed come true, an' a' ither thing gane richt wi' 'er, peer 'oman. The best fun wi' Dawvid was wi' Sir Simon 'imsel' the tither day. He sees Dawvid comin' for 's orders, clenchin awa' wi' a bit staffie in 's han'. Sir Simon was o' the Greens at the side o' the braid walk—an' says he, 'What's the matter now, Hadden?' says he. 'Ou, sir,' says Dawvid, 'I've strained my quiyte. 'Your what?' says Sir Simon. 'Oné o' my cootes,' says Dawvid, turnin' up the side o' 's fit. 'Oh,' says Sir Simon, 'sprained your ankle—How did that come about?' 'Weel, sir,' says Dawvid, 'I cudna richtly tell; it was the day't aw was doon throu', it cam' o' me a' at ance—jist a kin' o' income.' 'I wanted to send you some errands, but I must get some one else—you'll not be able to go.' 'I mith manage, keep 'aff o' braes an' kittle road, siclike 's owre by the Kirktoon,' says Dawvid; an' fan my lad kent that it was to the Broch disna he set oot like a five-year-aul'; nae word o' the straint, queet syne, fan he cud win awa' doon an' get a boose wi' some o' 's cronies."

It was the temporary absence of Jock Will himself from the shop, and the fact that Meg was being served by the 'prentice, aided by Sandy Peterkin, that had given her full scope for indulging in all this pleasant gossip.

"Is that a' noo?" asked Sandy, in the usual business way.

"Weel, I dinna min' upo' naething mair, but my puckle preens, an' a stan' o' wheelin' weer; the lang evenin's's drawin' on noo, an' it's tiresome nae to hae a bit shank to tak' i' yer han' files. An' I've a pair or twa o' stoot moggans 't aw think 'll be worth fittin'."

Meg got her preens gratis, and closed a bargain about the stan' o' wires accordingly. This concluded her purchases, but she was not quite spent of talk, and as no other customer had happened to come in, she held the good-natured Sandy Peterkin a little longer with her tongue.

"Ay," said Meg, "leanin" herself leisurely "doon" on a seat by the side of the counter, "an'-so ye'll be haein' nae ordinar' o' mairriages amo' ye in a han'-clap."

"Aw dinna ken," said Sandy Peterkin, blandly.

"Dinna ken! Hoot, fye. Ye *are* a peer set, you an' the merchan' baith. Fat sud 'a gar't him lat the chappie M'Aul rin awa' wi' Mrs. Gibb's lassie? Aw'm seer there's nae a blyther, better-leukin lass i' the pairis'."

"I'm weel seer o' that, Mistress Raffan; an' gin she get Willy M'Aul she'll get a richt clever, weel-deein lad, an' a weel-faurt."

"Ou, aw dinna misdoot that; an' he'll get a braw doon-sit at Gushetneuk—likely Maister Gibb'll be lea'in 't an' biggin a bit cottage till himsel' about the Broch, or siclike. But wudna 't 'a been unco handy for Johnny Wull to get her, an' the bit clossach that'll come fan 'er aunt wears awa'?"

"It was raither thocht that young Peter Birse was to get Mary, wasna 't?" said Sandy in his own simple way.

"Na, Sandy Peterkin, man," exclaimed Meg Raffan lifting both her hands; "an' that's a' that ye ken about it! We expeck to get the news fan we come to the merchan's chop; ye mith lea' 't to the like o' me to be speerin about Peter Birse—he's wun intill a bonny snorl, aw doot, peer stock."

"Hoot awa'; his fowk'll be vex't about that."

"Weel, ye may jist say that, Sandy. His mither hed inveetit me owre by to get the news, the gloamin aifter a' the places wus set. She's a byous aul' acquaintance o' mine, ye see; an' awat I've been aye vera fawvourable till 'er, an' never loot on about 'er fools, though she's sent them, owre an' owre again, half-nyaukit, stairv't creaturs, 't ye wudna fin' i' yer han', forbye to sen' them in to Tibby, the

kyeuk, for the table. Aweel, nae wottin o' fat hed been brewin', though I was weel awaar that Dawvid hen gi'en them a' a begeck, I steps my wa's up by to Clinkstyle. The goodman 'imself' was pirlin about the byre doors wi' a bit graipie in 's han', an' 's breeks row't up, and cryin' at the men. He was unco dry like, fan I leet at 'im in a menner, nae meanin' nae ill, ye ken, 'Na, Clinkies, ye've seerly younger fowk,' says I, 'to leuk aifter the beasts—fat needs ye be aye hingin i' the heid o' things?' Wi' that he mum'lt oot something aboot fowk makin' themself's eesefu' as lang's they not the bit an' the dud. Only he was aye a sauchen, saurless breet; an' I thoct little o' that, but gaed awa into the hoose, an' meets hersel at the vera door. 'Weel, Mistress Raffan,' says she, 'I'm glaid to see ye; na, but foo the ouks rins by, I didna think that it was near the time o' gi'ein' in the fools; ye'll be haein' mair company wi' the laird bein' at hame.' 'Deed no, Mistress Birse,' says I, 'it's nae upo' that precunnance 't I cam' here the nicht, at ony rate; I'm nae sae dottl't 's that, though some fowk's memories is nae vera gweed.' 'Keep me, Marget,' quo' she, 'fat am aw speakin' aboot? my heid's in a creel, seerly; come awa' in an' rest ye.' An' wi' that she tak's me awa' ben to their hole o' a parlour; they've gotten a secont-han' rickle o' a piano in o' 't noo for Miss Birse, an' twa three bits o' beuks laid doon here an' there. The dother was there 'ersel', a vera proper Miss, nae doot. 'Will ye take a seat, please?' says she, an' wi' that her mither says, 'Liza, wud ye gae to the kitchie an' tell Eppie'—that wud be the servan' lass, nae doot—'to pit in jist a jimp full o' the timmer ladle o' yesterday's mornin's milk an' a starn meal amo' the kail to the men's sipper—I canna win ben eenoo.' Wi' a' this, no, I notices brawly that the quine hed been greetin'. An' thinks I, for as sharp's ye are, ye hinna hodd'n that, no. Aweel, Mrs. Birse begood wi' a fraise aboot foo aw hed been keepin', an' this an' that, sittin' as stiff's a clockin hen upon a dizzen o' turkey's eggs. But brawly kent I that a' this was but a scoug to keep some ither thing oot o' sicht. Aw cudna



think that the lossin' o' Gushetneuk was the occasion o' 't a'; but she was nae mair like fat she hed been afore nor caul' sowens is like het aleberry. Hooever, thinks I, 'Madam, I'se be at the boddom o' this, no.' I sits awa' a fyow minutes, nae to leuk oonceevil like for a' this—I hed lows't the strings o' my mutch an' ta'en the preen oot o' my shawl. 'Ye're het,' says she. 'Deed awat, I *am* that,' says I, 'it's jist a fêrious fortiggan road atween oor place an' this.' But, wud ye believe 't, Sandy Peterkin, an' 't hedna been 't aw socht a drink o' water, I wud 'a gaen oot o' that hoose on-been bidden kiss a caup! 'Eh,' says she, 'aw'm richt sorry 't oor ale is *not* drinkable, it's jist new aff o' the barm.' 'Ou, weel, Mistress Birse,' says I, 'we're nae ill aff wi' a drap clean water. We've kent ither fowk ere noo 't hedna mony choises.' Wi' that she gya'er heid a bit cast. 'We're nae jist come to that yet, no,' quo' she; an' oot wi' twa three o' that bits o' braid-boddom't bottlies fae the aumry—their sideboard, nae less—an' pooers a drap in'o a wee shall o' a glessie. 'This is a vera nice cordial, recommen'it by Maister Pettiphog, that's a streck teetotaller an' a byous gweed man,' says she. Ayweel, aw cudna but drink it for ceevility's sake—a jilp o' fushionless, tasteless trash; it is *not* gweed for a body's inside, they may say fat they like aboot it. Hooever, there wasna as muckle o' 't 's dee naebody gryte skaith; an' I tribbletna them wi' lang o' my company, aw can tell ye."

Meg Raffan had gone on all this while with only a barely audible ejaculation now and again from Sandy, who on the whole felt rather embarrassed at being made the depository of her narrative, and flitted backward and forward in the short space between his desk and the counter; while the apprentice, with his elbows on the counter, his cheeks and chin resting on the palms of his hands, and his check-sleeved forearms forming a support between, hung rather than stood, a fixed and interested auditor. After a pause Meg proceeded—

"Weel, weel, I gat it a' gin four-an-twenty 'oors, no."

"Raelly," said Sandy Peterkin, vaguely.

"She's idolees't that faimily o' hers aneuch to fesh a jeedgment o' them. Aw'm seer for a file back it was aye 'oor Patie's' this; an' 'oor Patie's' that, till it wud 'a scunner't a tyke; but she'll maybe hae less to braig aboot Patie for the neist towmon."

"Has Patie deen ony ill?" queried Sandy.

"Ou, na, na; naething but fat was to be expeckit o' 'im. He's been aye a naisty lowlif't kin' o' a slype, wi' a' 's fader's gawketness, an' a gey gweed share o' 's mither's greed. Ye've heard, nae doot, that a creatur o' a deemie that was wi' them twa three year syne hed a bairn till 'im?"

"Eh, but it seerly wasna true!" exclaimed Sandy. "It wasna heard o' hardly."

"True! 'Wa' wi' ye! Gin't hed been a peer servan' lad, a' the pairis' wud 'a kent o' 't in an ouk's time. That's the wye't your walthy fairmers an' fairmers' sins keeps their bastards oot o' sicht—sen' the mithers o' them 'awa' oot o' the pairt; an' you that's el'yers never sees *their* faces i' the session: till aifter-hin, fan they've marriet i' their nain set, an' grow douce el'yers themsel's, like aneuch!

Sandy Peterkin could not stand this, and protested eloquently against the Free Kirk being chargeable with any such laxity of discipline.

"Ah weel, we'll see," said Meg Raffan. "Hooever, Mrs. Birse's Patie's throu' 't again. The same deemie's i' the faimily wye till 'im ance mair. Patie, it wud appear, made oot to keep it a' quaet, expeckin' to get Gushetneuk, an' pit's fader an' mither there to lat 'im mairry the creatur. Fan that gaed owre them, he grew as sulky's a wil' bear; the pooder was oot immedantly; an' Patie bann't's sister fat was her bizness; the creatur o' a deemie has an unco poo'er owre 'im, it seems, an' they're to be marriet at the term."

"An' fat's the lassie's fowk?"

"Weel, but aw canna tell ye that," answered Meg; "only aw ken that the aul' cadger mannie that ees't to ca' fish up this gate fae Collieston, wi' a gray horsie an' a cover't cairtie was 'er gran'fader, an' fuish 'er up feckly. So ye may guess

that the gentry o' Clinkstyle winna be jist owre prood o' their new freens."

That any formal assurance should be necessary to certify the accuracy of the intelligence conveyed to Sandy Peterkin by Meg Raffan was not once to be thought of. Meg had an incisive and unerring instinct in such matters. Where, or how, she obtained the information which formed the subject matter of her gossip it would often have been in vain to inquire; but on this you might rely, that in matters of domestic history in the neighbourhood, and particularly if the subject approached the borders of scandal, Meg was certain to be informed; and, moreover, if you were pleased to accept a statement of the case in hand *more Raffanico*, you obtained a narrative with such collateral references as carried its authenticity home to the weakest capacity. Poor Sandy Peterkin was at a loss what to think about it. He doubted whether he should have allowed Meg to go on, and after she had left the shop he began to wonder whether it was favourable to the morals of Jock Will's apprentice that he had been allowed to stand by and hear Meg gossiping away as she had done. But it was past and gone now; the apprentice did not seem, personally, to have either compunctions or apprehensions on the subject, and he certainly failed to show the like interest in the region of polemics into which Sandy, with a view to fortify his mind, endeavoured incontinently to lead him by an easy transition.

Sandy Peterkin took the subject of the two marriages to *avizandum*. In three days after it was noised abroad in the general community of Pyketillim that Willy M'Aul, the son of the humble souter, was to marry Mary Howie, and be farmer of Gushetneuk, *vice* Johnny Gibb; as also that Peter Birse junior, farmer's son, Clinkstyle, was to be married to the granddaughter of a fish cadger, and that the aid of Mr. Pettiphog, the celebrated lawyer, had been invoked to get a settlement legally made, whereby the said Peter Birse junior would be deprived of his right as heir of the tack of Clinkstyle, and sent adrift to somewhere undetermined, to follow fortune on his own account, with his low-caste wife.