

CHAPTER XIV.

TAM MEERISON'S PRIVATE AFFAIRS.

SIX months after the date of his removal from Gushetneuk, Tam Meerison had once more to decide on the question of renewing his engagement with his master, or seeking a new one. His experiences at Clinkstyle had not been altogether of the most pleasant sort, whether as regards his master or mistress or his fellow-servants, and the natural conclusion would have been that Tam certainly would not stay longer there. But conclusions in such cases are sometimes affected by circumstances which it is not so easy to guess at. A day or two before the feeing market day it had leaked out that Tam was bidin, and the fact considerably intensified the feeling of contempt which his fellow-servants had been in the habit of occasionally exhibiting towards him. They had hoped to leave Clinkstyle with a clean toon again, and they were angry at being disappointed. While Peter Birse manifested his satisfaction by talking more than usual to Tam, or stalking along for a bit with him at the plough, the lads lost no opportunity of throwing out a taunt at his craven resolution; or reminding him of those bygone interludes when Mrs. Birse had chosen to express her private opinion of him and his. Doubtless these taunts were not pleasant; but I don't know that they weighed most on Tam's mind at that particular juncture. In point of fact, the state of Tam's affections, combined with the adverse influences that seemed to be arraying themselves against

him, kept him in a condition of no little anxiety. Tam now bitterly regretted that pig-headed sense of self-importance on his part, which had made him, without the shadow of a valid reason, decline Johnny Gibb's first overture to re-engage him at the previous term; and thus had earned for him a bad situation in place of a good one—precisely the course that I have seen many more of Tam's class follow, to reach exactly the same end. But this was not all. Tam was seriously in love with Jinse Deans. Whether Jinse had hitherto reciprocated his passion in any true sense, I would be loth to venture an opinion. It was certain she received Tam as a suitor; but it was equally certain that Tam was not the only person so favoured. Tam knew this. Nay more, while he had over and over again met with what he reckoned "slichts" at the hands of his enchantress, he had an agonising suspicion that Johnny Gibb's new man, his own successor, and whom Johnny had described as a "stoot gudge an' a gatefarrin," was also stickin' up to Jinse. Ah! poor Tam, thou wert truly out of the frying-pan into the fire! Tam had writhed under and sought to resent the slight scorchings he had to endure from the youth Willy M'Aul on the subject of his courtship; next he had assumed the high horse with Johnny Gibb, and then left Gushetneuk a half-repentant man, allowing his successor to come in and court his sweetheart at leisure. Whereas, had he remained there still, he would have had opportunities for baulking competitors which none other could have had. It was like abandoning a strongly defensive position in face of the enemy.

So thought Tam Meerison, and his meditations were not sweet. When the next term approached, Tam accordingly contrived to get early information about Johnny Gibb's arrangements. Unhappily for him, his successor at Gushetneuk was bidin. "Jist like 'im; inhaudin scoonrel," thought Tam. However that might be, Tam had got a little bocht wit on the subject; and he felt that, if he stood at a certain disadvantage with Johnny Gibb's stoot gudge, inasmuch as the gudge, being at Gushetneuk, had so much

readier access to Jinse than he had, being at Clinkstyle; then if he left Clinkstyle, and ran the risk of having to transport himself several miles farther off, his position and prospects would be yet further damaged in proportion to the increased distance.

Therefore it was that Tam Meerison made up his mind to bear the ills he had, and to remain at Clinkstyle.

Another six months had passed and left his courtship much in the same state; but by that time Tam had put his foot in it, by talking disrespectfully of Master Benjamin Birse. It was in the kitchen, and, though Tam was not aware of it, Miss Birse was behind the inner door, where we have heard of her being before. What Tam had said was to the effect that "Benjie was an orpiet, peekin, little sinner;" and that "he was fitter to be a dog-dirder, or a flunkey, nor to gae to the college;" sentiments which—although they seemed to meet with a rather hearty response from the audience immediately before him—when retailed to Benjie's mother, were productive of a storm, that thereafter burst with no little fury about Tam's ears. Tam's mood, I fear, had been desperate at any rate, and he now retorted on Mrs. Birse by somewhat bluntly telling her she "mith be proud to see 'er loon wi' a pair o' yallow breeks an' a strippet waistcoat on; it wud be ten-faul better nor bein a muckle goodman, wi' a wife that wudna lat 'im ca' 's niz his ain." Mrs. Birse took this as personal. And when the term came, Tam left Clinkstyle, half reckless, as it seemed, of his fate; for surely Jinse's heart was too hard to win, and what else need he care for!

Tam Meerison had gone off to a distance of over a dozen miles, and for the next twelve months the region of Pyke-tillim saw nothing, and I really believe heard very little of, and still less from, him. For Tam was not a man of the pen. He had, indeed, learnt to write a sort of decent small text at school, but the accomplishment was of wondrous little use to him. He never wrote letters, except on very pressing emergencies, and not more than three or four of these had occurred since he became a man. It was not the mere

writing that dismayed him; it was the composition—foo to begin—and the backin'. These were the grand obstacles; and Tam's chief exercise in penmanship had been the occasional copying of some approved receipt for the composition of blacking for horse harness, in the way of friendly interchange with a cronie.

At the Martinmas of 1841, Johnny Gibb changed his principal man-servant. The gudge, whose ambition it was to rise, was leaving on a friendly understanding, with a view to go to school for a quarter with Sandy Peterkin, to rub the rust off his literary and arithmetical acquirements, and then learn the business of a mole-catcher when spring came, and Johnny promoted Willy M'Aul, now grown a stout lad of over nineteen, to his place. The gudge had been at the feeing market, from which he came home at a pretty late hour, and in high spirits, with sweeties in his pockets, not merely for Jinse, but for Mrs. Gibb as well, when fit opportunity should occur for presenting them.

"An' fat's the news o' the market, min?" asked Jinse of the gudge, who had seated himself at the top of the deece to eat his supper.

"Little o' 't; slack feein'; an' plenty o' drunk fowk."

"The waages doon?"

"Doon! Ay are they. Gweed men feein' at seyven-pun-ten; an' women for oot-wark hardly winnin abeen a poun' note. An' dizzens never got an offer."

"It's braw wardles wi' them't disna need to fee," said Jinse, with a sly reference to the gudge's hopeful prospects.

"Weel, Jinse, fat encouragement is there to the like o' me to bide on an' loss my time at fairm wark? Ye may be the best han't ever gaed atween the pleuch stils, but ye can never get an ondependent or sattlet wye o' deein."

"Div ye mean a place o' yer nain?"

"Weel, gin a body cud hae the chance o' gettin' a bit craftie. But I'll appel to yersel', Jinse—Fat comes o' maist ilka fairm servan' 't gets a wife?"—(and the gudge

looked sweetly on Jinse)—“they’re forc’t to tak’ to the dargin, an gae awa’ an’ bide aboot the Broch, or some gate siclike.”

“But hinna ye nae mair news?” said Jinse, desirous of turning the conversation.

“In fack, there’s nae chance but slave on to the en’ o the chapter; oonless ye win in to some ither wye o’ deein in time,” continued the gudge, whose own scheme naturally occupied a favourable place in his thoughts at the time.

“Hoot, min, gi’e’s the news o’ the market,” said Jinse.

“Weel, fat news wud ye like?”

“Fa’s bidin or flittin’?”

“Weel, I didna hear particular. Ye see I was oot o’ the throng a gey file arreengin some things o’ my nain.”

“Gweeshtens, ye’ve seerly been sair ta’en up. Didna ye traffike neen wi’ common fowk the day?”

“Ou weel, ye see, fan a body has some buzness o’ their nain to atten’ till they’re nae sae sair ta’en up wi’ fat’s gaen on in general.”

“Sawna ye nae bargains made ava?”

“Weel, the only bargain’t aw cud say’t aw saw was Mains o’ Yawal feein’ a third horseman. I was in ’o Kirkie’s tent gettin’ a share o’ a gill wi’ a cheelie ’t I was ance aboot the toon wi’, fan Mains cam’ in, skirpit wi’ dubs to the vera neck o’ ’s kwite. I didna ken the chap, naething aboot ’im, but fan they war jist aboot bargain’t Mains leuks owre an’ refars to me. ‘That’s an aul’ servan’ o’ mine,’ says he to the chap, ‘an’ ye can speir at him aboot the place.’ They hed threepit on a lang time; but an coorse wus comin’ nearer’t afore Mains socht the drink, an’ at length he bargain’t wi’ ’im for a croon oot o’ seyven poun’ to ca’ ’s third pair; an’ that was the only bargain’t I saw.”

“Did ye see ony o’ oor fowk—or hear onything about them?”

“I didna see neen o’ yer breeders.”

“I wud like richt to ken gin they be flittin’ or no. Neen o’ Clinkstyle’s fowk bidin’, aw reckon?” asked Jinse.

"That's weel min'et," exclaimed the gudge, with some vivacity. "Bidin'! na, nae lickly; but fa div ye think's comin' there again?"

"Comin' there again? Fa cud tell that—somebody hard up for a place, seerly?"

"Jist guess."

"Ha! fa cud guess that? Like aneuch somebody 't I min' naething about—fowk 't's cheengin the feck't they hae at ilka term."

"Weel," said the gudge, deliberately, "it's jist Tam Meerison!"

The light of Johnny Gibb's old iron lamp, with its one rush wick, was not brilliant at best; and it had been getting worse in consequence of the protracted sederunt in which the gudge had indulged. Therefore, though I rather think Jinse did start slightly, and colour a little at the intimation just made by the gudge, I don't think the gudge observed it; and, truth to say, the gudge himself was a very little agitated.

"Gae 'wa' to yer bed, than, this minit," said Jinse; "see, ye've keepit me sittin' wytein ye till the vera nethmost shall o' the lamp's dry."

And the gudge went to bed accordingly.

CHAPTER XV.

SANDY PETERKIN'S SCHOOL.

THE occasion of a muckle scholar coming to the Smiddyward school was an event of some importance. And, therefore, when the embryo mole-catcher presented himself on a Monday morning to meet the scrutiny of the thirty odd urchins under Sandy Peterkin's charge, there was a good deal of commotion and whispering. He wore a pair of moleskin leggings, which extended up to the very thigh tops, and were there suspended by a little tag of the same cloth to the side button of his trousers. When he took off his bonnet his head was seen to be huddry; that is, noticeably huddry for such a civilised place as the inside of a school. He had been to Andrew Langchafts' shop at the Kirktown, and had there furnished himself with a slate and skallie, a pennyworth of lang sheet paper, unruled, and two quills for pens. These, with an old copy of "the Gray," were the furnishings for the ensuing scholastic campaign that was to fit him for entering on the practical study of mole-catching.

"Weel," said the new scholar, laying down his equipments on the side of the maister's desk, "aw'm jist gyaun to be the raith; an' aw wud like to win as far throu' 's aw cud."

"Coontin', ye mean?"

"Oh ay; in fack a body canna weel hae owre muckle o' it at ony rate."

"Fat progress hae ye made in arithmetic?" asked Sandy Peterkin.

The gudge scratched his head for a little; and then, wetting his thumb, proceeded to turn over the dog-eared leaves of his Gray. "Fack, I dinna jist min' richt. It's half-a-dizzen o' year sin' I was at the skweel. That was wi' Maister Tawse; an' I daursay your wye winna be the same's his wi' the coontin, mair nor ither things; so it winna maitter muckle."

"Ye've been through the simple rules at ony rate," suggested Sandy.

"Hoot ay; aw'm seer aw was that. Nyod, I think it was hereaboot," and the aspirant mole-catcher pointed to the place on the book.

"Compound Division?" said the maister, looking at the page.

"Ay," said the scholar, with a sort of chuckle; "but aw'm nae sayin' t' aw cud work it noo—aw wud better begin nearer the beginnin'."

"Weel—maybe Reduction."

"That wud dee fine. It's an ill-to-work rowle, an' I never oon'ersted it richt wi' Maister Tawse. Aw won'er gin aw cud win as far through's wud mak' oot to mizzour aff an awcre or twa o' grun, or cast up the wecht o' a hay soo?"

"That'll depen' on your ain diligence," said Sandy Peterkin, with a smile.

"Weel, I ance was neepours wi' a chap 't cud 'a deen that as exact's ye like; an' he not nae leems till 't, nedderin, but jist a mason's tape line 't he hed i' the locker o' 's kist."

"It's quite possible to dee that wi' a marked line," answered the dominie.

"It's richt eesefu' the like o' that," said the gudge; "an' fan a body's gyaun aboot like, they wud aye be gettin' 't adee noo an' than, and cudna hardly foryet the wye. Noo, Maister Tawse wud never lat's try naething o' that kin', 'cep we hed first gane throu' a great heap o' muckle rowles; an' that disna dee wi' the like o' hiz 't hisna lang time at a skweel."

"An fat ither lessons wud you like to tak'?" asked the maister.

"Ye ken best; only it was for the coontin 't I cam'; an' leernin' to mak oot accoonts maybe."

"We hae a grammar class noo—wud you try it?"

"Na, na; aw winna fash wi' 't," said the gudge, with a decisive shake of the head. "It's nae for common fowk ava that gremmar."

"Maybe geography than. I've a gweed chart on the wa' here 't ye cud get a skance o' the principal countries upon vera shortly."

"Weel, but is 't ony eese to the like o' me, that geography? I wanna lickly be gyaun to forrin pairts."

If there was one branch more than another on which Sandy Peterkin set a high value, and on which, as a travelled man, he loved to descant, it was geography. So he pressed its importance, and a dubious consent was given to trying an hour at it once a week, it being understood that the future mole-catcher would not be subject to the catechis lesson on Saturdays. Then, as he had a suspicion that his new pupil was not too well up in his general literature, Sandy suggested the propriety of his taking a reading lesson.

"Na; aw hardly think 't I'll fash wi' that edder," was the reply. "I was never that deen ill at the readin', an' I was i' the muckle Bible class afore aw leeft the skweel."

"But ye maybe hinna read muckle sinsyne; an' ye wud get a lot o' usefu' information i' the Collection lesson."

"But the like o' me's nae needin' to read like the minaister," said the muckle scholar, with a laugh, "an' it wud gar's loss a hantle o' time fae the coontin. An' oor at that, an' syne the vreetin—the day wud be deen in a han'-clap, afore a body cud get oot mair nor a question or twa."

However, Sandy succeeded in persuading him to take the Collection lesson. When the lesson came, he did not like to bid him stand up among a dozen urchins so much smaller than himself. The muckle scholar sat with his sturdy legs

crowded in below the incommodious desk. He floundered through his turn at reading in a style at which his junior class-fellows did not always conceal their mirth. But he was too self-centred to be particularly thin-skinned, and Sandy Peterkin was indulgent, even to the extent of taking care that the graceless young rapscaillions should spell every hard word in the muckle scholar's hearing, while Sandy spared him such trials: albeit he improved the time when the gudge's turn came by a short homily on the importance of attention to correct spelling. Then would our mature class-fellow seize his slate, and gravely set on to the piecemeal solution of "the Gray," from which occupation it was found that none of the ordinary devices would distract him. And at writing time, when the dominie sat in his desk, knife in hand, with a *chevaux de frise* of quill feathers, held in idle or mischief-loving hands, surrounding his nose as he diligently mended, or new-made, pens for a score of writers, the muckle scholar spread himself to his task, and grimly performed his writing exercise. He would also at times stay after the school was dismissed, and get the benefit of Sandy Peterkin's private instructions for an hour or so.

In short, there could be no doubt that the gudge would pass into the world again accomplished beyond many of his contemporaries; and thereafter he could hardly fail of attaining something of distinction in his destined walk, and with that distinction the attendant emoluments.

As Johnny Gibb's late servant moved about Smiddyward (he had got boarded and lodged, for the time, with Widow Will), he could not help reflecting on these things; and it occurred to him that in his own person he presented a very eligible matrimonial bargain for any well-disposed young woman. And why should he not look over occasionally to Gushetneuk to keep up his friendly relations with Johnny and Mrs. Gibb, and let Jinse Deans know how expansive a place the world was to men of enterprise? I rather think that Jinse still needed a little contrivance now and then to prevent undesirable rencontres between certain of her sweethearts. And this was the real explanation which the gudge,

who was a simple soul, and still loved to indulge in late sittings, ought to have got to account for the peremptoriness with which he had been once or twice ordered to his home. But Jinse condescended to no explanations on what seemed her capricious treatment of the lad. And, of course, Jinse could not help what might emerge beyond the range of her influence.

So it happened that, on a certain evening, when the gudge had got himself comfortably fixed up on the smiddy hearth, and was talking away full swing in a half-oracular sort of style to several other lads, his old rival, Tam Meerison, came in with a long stack of plough irons on his shoulder to be sharpened. Tam first threw off his burden with a heavy clank; then, after saluting the smith, lifted it into the glowing light of the fire at the edge of the hearth, and, with a hammer he had laid hold of, proceeded to knock the piled coulter and socks out of connection with each other. He next glanced across the hearth, and without addressing anybody very directly, exclaimed—"Wa' oot o' that; ye've been birslin yer shins lang aneuch there." The gudge's lessons probably required his attention about that particular period of the evening. At any rate, he soon found that his time would not permit further loitering in the smiddy just then. Tam took the vacated place on the hearth, and lighted his pipe with every appearance of satisfaction. He had just done so when the smith, who was not unaware apparently of the relations between the two, wickedly endeavoured to blow the flame of jealousy, by waggishly informing Tam of the hopeful prospects of his rival.

"Tak' moles!" quoth Tam, whose manner had evidently progressed of late in the direction of brusqueness. "I wud as seen ca' stinkin' fish wi' a horse worth auchteenpence."

"Hoot, min, but he's gyaun to get Jinse Deans for's wife fanever his apprenticeship's throu'," said the smith.

"Hah, hah, ha-a-a," roared Tam, with a loud laugh. "It's been to help 'im wi' that that he heeld in wi' Johnny Gibb sae lang."

"I wudna won'er," said the smith. "But she's a

muckle thocht o' 'oman, Jinse. They speak o' lads comin' back to the place aifter they've gane hyne awa', jist for her sake—that's a greater ferlie, seerly. Fat wud ye say to that?"

"Fat! That they're great geese. Na, na, smith, 'The back o' ane's the face o' twa;' that's the style for me. Hah, hah, ha!"

"An' ye hinna been at Gushetneuk than, sin' ye cam back to the quarter?"

"Nane o' yer jaw, min. Min' yer wark there, an' gi'e that sock a grippie o' yird. Clinkies likes his stibbles weel riven up; an' the set't he hed hed wi' 'im afore the term's been makin' bonny wark till 'im i' the backfaulds."

"Ou, I thocht young Peter an' him atween them wud 'a manag't to keep them richt—nae to speak o' yer aul freen the mistress."

"I wuss ye hed jist seen the place, than. Nae the vera pattle shafts but was broken, an' the harness gray an' green for wunt o' cleanin'. I b'lieve the wife was at them aboot that, an' got jist a richt nizzin for ance i' the wye o' ill jaw."

"Ye wudna dee the like o' that, Tam?"

"Sang, she'll better nae try 't, though. But a body's mad to see the wye 't they hed been guidin' the beasts. Yon's a snippit horsie 't was i' the secont pair—yon young beastie—jist clean spoil't. He was some skittish at ony rate, an' the chap hed laid upon 'im an' twistet 'im wi' the ryne till he's a' spoil't i' the mou' completely; an' I'm seer he hed latt'n 'im oot amon's han's i' the theets, for ye cudna lippen till 'im as lang's ye wud turn yer fit. Clinkies gar't me tak' 'im an' pit 'im on to the muckle broon horse, to try and steady 'im. But I can tell ye it's nae gryte job haein' to dee wi' ither fowk's botch't wark."

"'Deed no, Tam; but I've nae doot ye'll dee yer best wi' 't. I' the meanwhile ye mith gi'e me a chap to tak' doon the point o' the coulter a bit."

Tam put his pipe in his waistcoat pocket, and started to the forehammer with the greatest promptitude.

CHAPTER XVI.

A START IN LIFE.

ON a certain afternoon, about a week before the Whitsunday term of 1842, Johnny Gibb, who had been busy afield, came toddling home when the afternoon was wearing on, and went into the mid house, to look out sundry blue-checked cotton bags with turnip seed, for he meditated sowing of that valued root. He was hot and tired, and his spouse invited him to rest for a little on the decee. Would he take a drink of ale?

"Ay will aw, 'oman," said Johnny, "an' ye hae't at han'. Lat's see the caup there."

Mrs. Gibb obeyed the command, and Johnny drank of the reaming liquor with evident satisfaction.

"Rest ye a minit, than, an' drink oot the drap; for ye've never devall't the hail day," said Mrs. Gibb; and saying so, she lean't her doon, with some intention apparently of entering on a confab with her husband.

"Are ye thinkin' o' gyaun doon to the market on Wednesday?" asked she, with that kind of air which seems directly to provoke an interrogatory answer; and Johnny at once exclaimed—

"No; foo are ye speerin that? Ye ken't baith the boys is bidin: I've nae erran'."

"Ye never think o' speerin about Jinse," replied Mrs. Gibb, still in the key that suggested the necessity for an explanatory note.

"Jinse Deans!" exclaimed Johnny. "Fat's the eese o' speerin at her? An' she binna pleas't wi' 'er waages she wud seerly 'a tell't ye lang ere noo."

"I doot it's nae the waages a'thegither, peer 'oman. But Jinse's needin' awa'."

Mrs. Gibb had evidently made up her mind now to give some further explanation about this new movement, when, as Fate would have it, the colloquy was broken in upon by Jinse (who had been unaware of her master's presence there) herself at the moment stumbling into the kitchen, from which she had been temporarily absent.

"Fat haiver's this 't ye've ta'en i' yer heid noo?" demanded Johnny, addressing Jinse. "Are ye gyaun clean gyte to speak o' leavin yer place; and it only an ouk fae the term tee? Faur wud ye gae till?"

"Hame to my mither's," answered Jinse, exhibiting somewhat of discomposure at Johnny's vehemence.

Jinse's mother lived not far off Benachie, in a very unpretentious residence.

"An' fat on the face o' the creation wud ye dee gyaun hame?—Yer mither's but a peer 'oman; she has little need o' you wi' 'er," said Johnny.

Jinse, who was making, on the whole, an uneasy defence, averred that her mother "wasna vera stoot."

"But is she wuntin you hame?" was Johnny's demand. "Tell me that."

Here Jinse gave symptoms of breaking into tears, and Mrs. Gibb interposed with a "Hoot, man! ye're aye sae ramsh wi' fowk."

"Weel, weel," quoth Johnny, as he seized his bonnet and marched toward the door; "ye're a' alike. Fa wud ken fat ye wud be at!"

I don't know that Johnny Gibb meant to include his wife. The reference was rather to the class to which Jinse belonged, though, no doubt, he went away with the conviction that women-kind in general are absurdly impracticable in their ways. But be that as it may, Johnny found that he had to provide a new servant lass.

In private audience Jinse Deans had revealed to Mrs. Gibb, with many sighs and tears, that Tam Meerison had "promis't to mairry her." What more I don't know; but the worthy goodwife, after scolding Jinse as severely as it was in her nature to do, told her to "wash her face, an' nae mair o' that snifterin. An' gae awa' and get ready the sowens. I'se say naething mair aboot it till the term day's by. Nae doot ye'll be i' yer tribbles seen aneuch wuntin that."

Poor Jinse; the prospect of marriage did not seem a cheerful one for her, notwithstanding the number of candidates there had been for her hand. Of her reputed sweethearts, Tam Meerison was the one for whom she had at any rate affected to care the least; and since the time Tam had begun seriously to court her, his jealousy had been again and again roused by the undisguised preference given to others, his rivals. And yet Tam Meerison was to have her to wife. It would be wrong to say that Tam had not a certain feeling of satisfaction in the thought of this; for, notwithstanding his adoption latterly of a more seeming-reckless style, Tam had been from an early date severely smitten by Jinse's charms. Indeed his satisfaction was presumably considerable, else he had probably not formed the laudable resolution to marry. But then there were counterbalancing considerations. The idea of marriage as an actual event had been forced upon him with a kind of staggering suddenness, which caused the approach of the reality itself to awaken a rather uncomfortable feeling of responsibility. Tam began to see that it would be troublesome to go about, and he had but a dim notion of the indispensable technicalities. Then there was the question of a house and home for his wife; and here Tam's case no doubt merited commiseration. There was no house whatever available within a circuit of several miles; for the lairds in the locality, in the plenitude of their wisdom, and foreseeing the incidence of a poor law, had, as a rule, determined that there should be no possibility of paupers seeing the light on their properties. They would rather pull down every cottage on their estates. What could poor Tam do?

Jinse said she would go to her mother's. Where Jinse's mother lived was three miles off; and with her mother Jinse could only get what share she might of a hovel that very barely afforded room for two beds in its dark and diminutive but and ben. And there, also, an unmarried sister and two brothers, all in farm service, claimed to have the only home they possessed. It was not greatly to be wondered at if Tam felt perplexed, and began to consider marrying really a stiff business. It was under this feeling of perplexity that he succumbed once again to Clinkstyle's offer of a renewed engagement, and in order to get one foot at least planted down without more trouble, agreed to bide with Peter Birse for another six months.

Tam had ventured across to Gushetneuk at a suitable hour on the night of which we have been speaking, to talk over with his affianced what most nearly concerned him and her.

The two sat on the decee again; and this time nobody disturbed them. Jinse was sobbing. Tam put his arm about her; and there was genuine feeling in the poor chap's words, I have not the least doubt, as he said in his tenderest tones, "Dinna noo, Jinse—Ye 'se never wunt a peck o' meal nor a pun' o' butter as lang's I'm able to work for't."

By and by Jinse's emotion moderated, and they got into a more business strain; and then Tam asked—

"Does Gushets ken yet?"

"Eh, aw dinna ken richt; aw never got sic a gast's aw got the nicht i' the aifterneen, fan aw haumer't into the kitchie upo' the mistress an' him speakin' something or anither about me gyaun awa'."

"But an' coorse she kent aboot it afore?"

"She jist kent the streen't I wudna be here aifter the term; I gyauna 'er muckle audiscence fan she speer't foo I was leavin'. But an' ye hed heard the maister fan he brak oot—I cudna 'a haud'n up my heid, Tam, nor been ongrutt'n, deen fat I hed liket!"

"An' did ye tell him onything mair, than?"

"Geyan lickly! Fa wud 'a deen that, noo? But I

tell't her aifter he was awa'—it was rael sair, Tam," and Jinse threatened greetin again.

"Did she say ony ill upo' me?" asked Tam.

"No; but though the maister was in a terrible ill teen, jist aboot's gyaun awa' an' that, I was waur, gin waur cud win, fan she scault's an' gya's sae muckle gweed advice, tee."

"Ou weel, Jinse, we're nae waur nor ither fowk, nor yet sae ill's plenty."

With this comforting reflection the conversation turned, and Jinse asked—

"But fat are ye gyaun tae dee a' simmer?"

"I'm bidin' again."

"Bidin' at Clinkstyle?"

"Ay."

"But it's a coorse place to bide in, isnin't?"

"Weel," answered Tam, slowly, and not quite willing, in the circumstances, to make that admission, "the wife's some roch an' near b'gyaun, but there's little tribble wi' the maister 'imsel."

"Didna ye hear o' nae ither place at the market?"

"But I wasna there. I bargain't the day afore, and didna seek to gyang. Ye see I taul' the maister't I wud tak' a day for't fan the neeps is laid doon."

Tam evidently considered this a stroke of management, and Jinse, brightening up a little, asked—

"An' fan wud it need to be?"

"Jist as seen's things can be sattl't. We maun be cried on twa Sundays, at ony rate."

"Twa Sundays?"

"Ay, there's nane but puckles o' the gentry gets't deen in ae Sunday, aw b'lieve."

"Weel, ye maun come up to my mither's on Saiturday's nicht."

"Ou ay, an' we can speak aboot it better than. Your mither'll ken a' aboot the wye o't, I'se warran'. But I doot she'll be pitt'n aboot wi' 's bidin' there. I wuss we cud 'a gotten a hoose ony wye."

"Weel, we maun jist pit up wi' things like ither fowk, I suppose."

"But it'll mak' sic a steer in her hoose, ye ken."

"Oh, we'll manage fine for that maitter. There's her but bed, it's nae vera sair in order eenoo; but I've twa fedder pillows o' my nain, an' a patch't coverin', forbye a pair o' blankets 't the mistress helpit's to spin, an' gya's the feck o' the 'oo'. There'll be plenty o' room for my kist i' the but, an' ye maun hae yer ain kist aside ye, ye ken."

"But yer mither winna hae gweed sparin' 'er room constant; it's nae's gin't war only a fyoo ouks. She winna get nae eese o' 't hersel'."

"Ou, but ye ken there's nane o' oor fowk comes hame eenoo, 'cep Rob, an' Nelly at an antrin time; Jamie's owre far awa'. An' ony nicht 't Rob's there, gin ye chanc't to be the same nicht, you twa cud sleep thegither, seerly; an' I cud sleep wi' my mither, an' Nelly tee, for that maitter."

"Foo af'en does Rob come?"

"About ance i' the fortnicht or three ouks."

"I think I'll win near as af'en's that mysel'," said Tam, upon whose mind the general effect of this conversation had been rather exhilarating than otherwise. His sweetheart had not merely contrivance; she had also foresight and thrift, evidently, as the general inventory given of her providin' testified. Still he hankered after a house that he could call his own. It was not that Tam's ambition on this point was extravagant. If he could get one end of a but an' a ben cottage, about such a place as Smiddyward, with a cannas-breid of a garden, and the chance of going to see his wife once a week, he would have been well content.

But this Tam found to be impracticable. He made full inquiry; and even invoked the aid of his acquaintance the smith, whose banter was turned into hearty sympathy with the statement of the case now laid before him. The smith tackled Dawvid Hadden, the ground-officer, and urged the reparation of part of the old erections of which Sandy Peterkin's school formed the main wing, as a dwelling for Tam. As the manner of sycophants dressed in a little

delegated authority is, Dawvid's answer was a kind of echo of what he imagined Sir Simon would have said, "Na, na, smith, it's a very fallawshus prenciple in fat they ca' poleetical ecomy to encourage the doonsittin' o' the like o' them in a place.—Ou, it's nae the expense. Na, na; the biggin o' a score o' hooses wud be a mere triffle, gin Sir Simon thocht it richt in prenciple—a mere triffle. But there they sit doon, an' fesh up faimilies till they wud thraten to full a destrick wi' peer fowk—the Brod cud never keep the tae half o' them. No; I'm weel seer they'll get nae hoose i' the pairis' o' Pyketillim."

It was not a kindly speech that of Dawvid Hadden; albeit it expressed, firstly, the newest view of political economy in the locality, which was just then beginning to be practically carried out; and, secondly, an accurate statement of Tam Meerison's chances of getting a house within the parish. In this particular, Tam had his strong wish and reasonable desire completely defeated. It may be difficult for the man who lives in a comfortable home with his family about him to estimate with precision either the keenness of feeling, or the deteriorating effects involved in such disappointment. I don't think it should be difficult for any man to make up his mind as to giving a hearty condemnation to the too common land policy which has entailed the like cruel hardship upon hundreds of honest hard-working men in the class to which Tam belonged.

But my business is not to moralise, I daresay; and I have only to add to this chapter that, as better could not be, Tam Meerison and Jinse Deans had no help for it but get married, and commence their career of wedded bliss under the slenderly-equipped conditions already indicated.