

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HOWDY AND THE BONE DOCTOR.

“The hireman wi’ the dookit mare is awa’ to seek the howdy.”

OLD SONG.

THE howdy was not only a person of importance, but she was a benefactor to the parish in which she dwelt. During the first decades of the last century there were many parishes in the North that had no doctor within their boundaries. In such parishes the howdy was indispensable. She was really the most important person in it, and she was generally a woman that carried herself with becoming dignity. In our parish we had one whose fame made her much sought after in other places. She was in all respects a superior woman, and could tell the number of bairns that she brought into the world, and more or less of their life history. She used to tell with great glee how Nelly Fleming, a famous howdy, served poor Jock M’Alister when his wife was first confined. He would not be kept off “the door-stane.” Every few minutes he came asking “Foo’s Kirsty noo, mistress?” The howdy noticed a gized barrel standing at “the cheek o’ the door.” “Jock,” said she, “tak’ the water stoups an’ fill that bowie tae the brim wi’ spring water. There winna be ony betterness for Kirsty till ye fill that bowie tae the brim.” Poor Jock set to work with a hopeful heart, and carried and poured load after load into the barrel, but all in vain; he could not accomplish his task. When wellnigh exhausted, he heard the welcome voice of the howdy calling to him, “Gi’e ower, Jock, an’ come in; Kirsty wants tae see ye.” Soon after this event, Jock heard that the wife of his crony, Peter Mitchell, was about to be confined, and he exclaimed, “L—d help Peter, puir man, if he has tae carry the water.”

When “the hireman wi’ the dookit mare” came clattering down the village street, every wife ran out to hear the news about “the wife that wantit the howdy.”

The late William M’Connachie, of the Haugh of Elchies,

ministered to humanity in a different way to the howdy. His name was known from the Ness to the Dee as a wonderful bone-setter, and people came to him from far and near to have their broken bones set and their sprained limbs adjusted. The gift of bone-setting seems to have been hereditary in that branch of the M'Connachie family. Even the women were skilful bone-setters, but "Haughy's" reputation surpassed all the rest of the family. He was not only able to relieve their pains, but he cheered their spirits by his kind sympathy while he was of necessity giving them pain. Big in stature, his round, kindly face beamed with benevolence. He was truly a benefactor to his kind, and his name deserves to be held in remembrance on Speyside. The gatherings that nightly met around "Haughy's" hospitable fireside ought to have been portrayed by Wilkie. While one of the company read the *Aberdeen Journal*, the rest listened with eagerness and attention visible on every face. The paper that gave an account of the coronation of our late beloved Queen drew tears from the eyes of the old man. He said, "Oh, lads, it wad be a gran' sicht tae see her seated on the aul' stane wi' the croon on her head. God grant that she may ha'e the wisdom o' Solomon, an' be like his father David, victorious ower her enemies. It's a bonny name Victoria for a Queen." Old "Haughy" was a man full of kindness and good intentions. When he lifted his potato crop, he never failed to send a bag of his "mealy peters" to every cottar around the place. His benevolence knew no bounds.

AUL' "HAUGHY'S" DEAD.

Aul' "Haughy's" dead and gone at last,
 Killed by fell winter's biting blast;
 Oh! cruel Death, you might have passed
 The old man's door;
 Not tied his supple fingers fast,
 To move no more.

When we did our legs or arms sprain,
 He was the man to ease our pain;
 We'll wish for "Haughy," but in vain;
 No more we'll view
 His kindly, honest face again,
 Of rosy hue.

When on the ice we made a slip,
 Or idle schoolboys made us trip,
 Disjointing ankle, leg, or hip,
 And could not stand,
 All that we needed was a grip
 Of "Haughy's" hand.

Laid on their backs in cart or car,
 Lame folks came from near and far,
 Their limbs tied to a lath or spar
 To keep them steady,
 Till they were laid by "Haughy's" hearth,
 Where he was ready.

When idle weans and bairnies fell,
 And broke their bones ower dyke or rail,
 With bandages and wooden spale
 He set them right ;
 Their joyful mothers, thankful, tell,
 And show the sight.

Now that old "Haughy's" dead and gone,
 With joints wrenched out or broken bone,
 On bed or sofa we may moan,
 He cannot aid ;
 His magic hands are cold as stone,
 And helpless laid.

His kindly words and cheerful mood,
 His honest heart, so true and good,
 Dispelled the clouds that often brood
 When pains distress ;
 With purse and hand he ready stood
 To make them less.

"The Drummer" was another public benefactor. He was indispensable at one time in most northern parishes. He was a functionary that had a most important duty to perform, namely, to perambulate the village street twice a day and beat the drum—in the morning at six o'clock to waken the lieges to their daily toil, and again at nine o'clock at night to warn them off to bed. We cannot at the present day form any estimate of the service "The Drummer" rendered at a time when clocks and watches were few and far between in a country parish. The following couplet gives a true representation of many a hamlet and village in the North:—

"In the aul' toon o' Duffus there is neither watch nor clock,
 But parritch time an' sowens time, an' aye yoke, yoke."

The dwellers in many a Highland strath and glen had no other indication of the flight of time than the shadow of some prominent rock on a mountain or hill top. "The dial-stone, aged and green," stood in the farmer's kailyard, but it was only of use when the sun shone. The sandglass was a thing almost unknown in the North of Scotland. In many houses the long monotonous winter nights were measured by the quantity of yarn done by the spinning wheel.

“The Drummer” had at one time a very disagreeable function to perform. He was called upon to “drum” any disreputable character beyond the parish boundary. There was an attempt made upon one occasion to revive this obsolete practice in our parish. A disreputable “Heilanman” came to reside in it, and his treatment of his wife had raised the ire of every wife in the place, and they egged on the young lads and boys to make him “ride the stang.” “The Drummer” flatly refused to beat the drum in the rear of the procession, so the loons went to work without him. A long boat-stang was procured, and with it the party proceeded to Duncan’s door and knocked. It was opened by Duncan’s wife, who asked “Fat dae ye want?” “We want tae speak tae yer man for a meenit ootside the door,” they replied. “The teil o’ ootside the door will Tuncan gang the nicht.” The leader of the force pushed the door open and entered the passage. In a moment the wife shut the door and barred it. Duncan and his wife fell upon the intruder and belaboured him to their hearts’ content. The wife laid on to him with the tongs, and Duncan threatened to take his life with an old skeandhu. The result was that Duncan left the place.