

THE WOOIN' O' KATE DALRYMPLE.

IN the gable end of a row of old thack houses, which formed, half-a-century since, a wing of the weaving clachan of Strathbungo, lived Kate Dalrymple, a homely old maid of some sixty odd summers.

Kate, according to rumour, was quite the reverse of a beauty. She had neither features nor complexion, and circumstances had made her very poor and dependent.

Thus situated, poor, neglected Kate Dalrymple had been allowed to vegetate into the condition of a sour old maid, without a single lover ever "speerin' her price." Kate, of course, maintained a very different story. She had been asked in marriage times without number, but she had never yet seen the man she could thole to love and live with.

But the chance occurrences of life are many, and an accidental event—the rumour of which was already brewing in the parish—was destined to completely change the quiet tenor of Kate Dalrymple's lonely and neglected existence.

Her maternal uncle—a rich, old Indian merchant—had died suddenly abroad, leaving her, rumour said, a legacy of £10,000.

There was a grain of truth in the rumour. The rich old uncle had really died, and had left his obscure relative, Kate Dalrymple, ten pounds—if not £10,000! The bulk of the deceased uncle's fortune had gone to a surviving sister in England, and the ten pounds legacied to poor Kate Dalrymple had been gratuitously magnified by the village gossips into the startling sum of £10,000!

Kate, it must be understood, was not responsible for the error. She was daily and hourly hearing the sum left her variously stated, each rumour taking a higher flight than the former, until—in imagination, at least—she might rate herself the wealthiest maiden lady in the village.

The result of all this, as was to be expected, was amusing in the extreme. By a curious reversion of all her former experiences, Kate, hitherto the loneliest and most neglected of womankind, now found herself the observed of all observers. Hats and caps were respectfully lifted to her as she modestly limped by; while courtesies and congratulations from unknown friends and relatives were freely offered her.

All this was novel and amusing to poor Kate, if not actually agreeable and pleasant. It was useless attempting to reason down the absurd rumour. It daily grew in proportion to the opposition offered it. The village had made up its mind on the matter, and lucky Kate Dalrymple was now a wealthy and fortunate woman, who would prove a fine "catch" to some needy fortune-hunter, gifted with an elastic conscience, and an oily flattering tongue. Within the last few days, she had been visited in turn by the entire village, from the parish minister down, and the harder she tried to reason her friends out of the amusing mistake, the more strongly did the wondering villagers believe in the reality of her £10,000 legacy!

The rumour soon spread beyond the parish boundaries, and Willie Postie, the village letter-carrier, was "jist kept on the trot" delivering letters of congratulation to Kate, from outlying friends and relations, of whose existence she had never known before.

A number of these epistles took the form of love-letters, the writers of which, in numerous instances, made business-like offers for her hand; and Kate Dalrymple was amused, if not a happy woman in the perusal of their contents.

It was an occasion of this kind that Kate, having had an extra bundle of letters put into her hand one evening, sat down to a perusal of their contents, fortified against anything approaching to nervous surprise by taking a good preliminary pinch of snuff. Seating herself by the fire, she proceeded to inspect the letters in detail.

"Here's yin frae David Dinwiddie, warper, Clayslaps. Weel, we'se hear what Davoc Dinwiddie's sayin' till't, tho' I'm certain I never in life had the pleasure o' even kennin' him."

Kate reads:—

"12 Stoor Terrace,
Clayslaps, October the second.

"MY DEER MISS KATE,—Pleeze acep the followin' pome, adrest to yoor sweet self. I hav long admired yoo in seekret, and I now taik the followin' oppertunity of addressin' my love-shoot to yoo in person, direck from the auld Clayslaps, where, in youth's flowery morning, wee twa ha'e paid't in the burn, and pu'd the gowans fine.—Hopin I am not forgotten, yours till death do us divide,

"DAVID DINWIDDIE.

"POME.

"TO MISS KATE DALRYMPLE.

"(Written and Composed by her loving admirer, David Dinwiddie.)

"When you an' I was young, Kate,
We werena vera auld,
We roam'd thegither thro' the 'Slaps,
As I've in trooth been tauld;

Sometimes we walkit airm in airm,
 Sometimes we sittit doon,
 But aye the owre-come o' oor sang
 Was love's seraphic tune.

"I lov'd the weegle in your walk,
 Sae bonnilie ye went ;
 I lov'd the sneevil in your talk,
 Doon thro' the nostrils sent ;
 I lov'd ye early, lov'd ye late—
 Nae love, dear Kate, like mine !
 O, wilt thou—wilt thou—wilt thou be
 My ain auld valentine ?

"*P.S.*—Dear Kate,—Sir Walter Scott addresst a pome to Mrs. Scott's eyebroos—but, between you an' me, Kate, there's no yae feature o' yer bonnie face mair than anither that I could specialise oot for pomeing. Where all is sweetness an' grace, it woud be invidious to particularise. Perfection whispered passing by, 'There goes Kate Dalrymple !'

"Second *P.S.*—A line frae you to Clayslaps telling me when to call on ye, woud much oblige your devoted

"D. D.

"Na, na, Davoc Dinwiddie," soliloquised Kate, "it'll no fit; yer statement's a stowp that'll no cairry water. I'll gi'e yer love-epistle a warm reception onyway, whatever comes o' yer threatened visit," and, poov the warper's billet was thrown into the fire.

"What's next, I wonder?"

Reads:—

"Coal-Ree Square,
 'Towe-Rowe Land, Cross-Bungo,
 'Thorsday Morning, October 33rd.

"Mrs. Kait Drympell.

"DEAR MUM,—I'm after axin yees, ir ye've any noshun ov chingine yer single life into the W style? If yees have, I'm yer man! And let me tell ye, a better or a more shoot-able husband than meself ye'll not find attwix this and—I dont know whare. I've got a good-going Coal-ree, well stock't wid all the latest black 'digs;' wid ten small

hand-barrows—all new, too, d'ye moind; not to mention a second-hand cuddy an' a cart—which the entire same is at yer swate disposall, if you'll be after having me. An' let me tell yees, in wan word—that's there not a harder-workin' coal-ree manufacturer between Towe-Rowe and I dont no whare—and miles beyond that, too, or may the hangman's rope know me neck! I've £2 in the bank; an', what's more, I'm a good man as well as a wealthy man. I've two karracters from the good priest here, and five from the ould parish minister—an' al ov racent date too, d'ye moind!—besides a whole chestful ov ould karracters, the same which I'm prepared to sell for a moderate price to any man in want ov a situation, and any single wan of which would set up a man for life; and it's the virgin truth I'm tellin' yees. An', mum, if ye're on for me, an' me Coal-ree, an' me karracters, an' me twelve new hand-barrows, an' me cuddy an' me cart, an' me £2 in the bank, an' I dont no what al, jist say what night I'll come round an' pay me addresses to yees, wid a clane shirt an' me best hat on; for I'm fairly bewitched wid yer purty face, an' yer winsum, wilin' ways, an' yer low swate musickall voice. So, name the happy day, mum, an' take possession of

“Yoor ould an' earnest Admirer,

“BARNEY COAL-GUM.

“*P.S.*—May I ax yees to favour me be return ov post wid a fottgraph ov yer own swate face, so as I may hev some noshun ov the personal appearance ov the swate an' enticin' Judy I'm now addressin'? Plase also to state if yees can count, as I've the intintion of giving yees the entire charge ov the weigh-scales in the Ree, when wance you've become the happy Mrs. Coal-Gum.—Hopin' to hev a favourable reply,

“I am, deer mum, yours entirely,

“BARNEY.

“*P.S.* wance more.—If yees moind makin' any personal enquiries about me, yees needn't; for there's not a wan in Towe-Rowe knows a happorth about me, except ould Mickey M'Ghee, and he knows nothing about me whatever; an' that's the virgin truth I'm tellin' yees, or may the rope know me neck.

“Yoor devoted wan,

“BARNEY.”

"My certie!" exclaimed Kate, "a coal-ree's no to be sneezed at, wi' the winter fast settlin' doon to frost an' snaw; but, meantime, we'll pit Barney Goal-Gum's epistle amang its local acquaintances—the heart o' the fire. But, preserve us, here's anither! an' a' the way frae the Hielan's, tae!"

Reads:—

"Ta Skyes,
"Portree, October ta 85.

"To Miss Kate Dalrimple.

"MY TEER MATTAM,—I wass pe very klad to meet wis an old friend of mine from Klasko, as was bec tellin' me he wass saw you there next week, and you wass be keepin' very well whatever, and was twice as more petter than you had been before for both before and since. My wife, Petsy, is rale pad shust now with ta windy kolics in ta stomach, and if ta gale increases to a hurricane, and she'll die, I'll hev to come down to Klasko to pe seekin' a new wife; and as I'll hev heard you'll hev got ten soosand pounds left you, you cood not get a more petter man to took care of it than your well-meaning friend and future husband,

"DOUGAL M'TAVISH.

"P. S.—My father and your father were well acquaint, and were in a manner related to each other, as I'll hev heard tell, for they very frequently often exchanged snuff-boxes, and took numerous drams wis each other on Sundays between the kirk-preachings. So, if anything happens wis Petsy, I'll come down ta Klasko in my fishing-boat at wance, and arrange ta pisness in private wis your own sweat self.

"Yours till death, and twice as more,

"DOUGAL."

In a second Kate had flung Dougal's fish-smelling letter into the fire, and picked up the next to hand. Glancing at the address on the envelope, she read—

"*Mis Kate Dalrimpel,*

"*At the Auld Thack Hooses,*

"*Stra'bungo.*"

“Oo ay, I ken fine wha’s scraggy handwriting that is—it’s frae auld Jean Tow, the ‘Camlachie relict,’ widow o’ auld Johnny Tow, an’ a forty-second kizzen o’ my mither’s. Noo, I wonder what auld Jean’s wantin’ wi’ me; but stop—it’s the siller, I’ll wager. The soogh o’ my legacy’s gane east the length o’ Camlachie, and this is Jean’s note o’ congratulation.”

Reads :—

“Weaver’s Raw, Camlachie,
“Thursday nite,
“ $\frac{1}{2}$ past 10 p.m.

DEER MISS KATE,—I hop this reeches yew all well, as it leeves me at presint, except a bad koff, wheech bothers me at nite, and wheech I am poultisin’ with linseed meel and mustart, and a chapter off Scriptur. And now, my deer Miss Kate, to return to family matters, doo yew know, I have found out that yew and I are klossly related to each other. My late respectit faither—rest and bless him!—was half-kizzen to a full kizzen of yoor respectit mither. And so, my dear Miss Kate, to come to the pint, I’m rale glad to think ye, in a measure, blood off my blood, and flesh off my flesh. And I’m certain sure, if my late lamented Johnny Tow was leevin this day, he would be the first to congratulate us baith on the happy relashunship. But I’ll be yont yoor way the morn’s afternoon, when I’ll tell yew all the news. For I’m wearyin’ rale mutch to see yew, as there’s no anither woman atween Camlachie and Stra’bungo that I respeck haff so mutch as I do my deer oot-lyin’ frien’ and blood relashun, Kate Dalrimpel.

“From yoor most affeckshunate relative,

“JEANIE TOW.

“P.S.—I was very neerly forgettin’ to mention the news I’ve just heard—that you’ve been left a fortin’. I’m rale glad to heer o’t. Is it true? Ten thoosand pounds, they say! Oh, my, Kate! if Johnny Tow had only been livin’ this day—rest and bless him!—would not he have valued nis wife (noo, alas! a relict) and her wealthy relashuns. Eh, me, my deer Miss Kate, but it’s an unco kald bisness to be a deid man’s relict, mair especially when the blankets

are worn thin, and there's nae meal in the girdel, nor ham in the fryin' pan, no to mention a 'bottle' as dry as a simmer stove! But I'll be roond your way the morn's afternoon, Kate, and till then I'm your devoted frien' and klossly-related blood relashun,

“JEANIE TOW.”

“*Me* a blood relation o' auld Jean Tow's! Weel, if that's no the hicht o' impidence! She needna try to tak' the len' o' me wi' her 'My dear Miss Kate' this, and 'My dear Miss Kate' the ither thing, for—fuff—there gangs her letter into the fire! But stop! there's a knock at the door, an' I hope it's no auld Jean herself.

Kate (from the inside)—“Wha's that?”

Voice (from the outside)—“It's me, Jeanie Tow, frae Camlachie, relict o' Johnny Tow, bless his beautifu' memory!”

Obedient to the summons, Kate got to her feet, and going to the door admitted the interesting “relict.”

“It's you, Jean!” was Kate's salutation; “what blast o' win' has blawn you here?”

“'Od, ye may weel ask that, Kate; I've jist been blawn clean oot o' breath in comin' sae faur on fit. Yes, I'll sit doon a blink, thankee, for I'm jist fair dune oot. Hech me! when a body gets up in life a bit, their legs fail them. Ye ken, Kate, I haena oor John's kind airm to lean on noo. Eh, lass, when yince a woman's been in the twa-some traces, life's a wearisome journey wantin' the bit man. Thankee, I'll tak a bit taste o't—jist the wee'st pourin', tho', for I'm deid against the dram for onything mair than medicine. A bit thimblefu' o't, tho', syndet owre wi' a strong pepper-mint drap, breaks the win' on the stammach finely. Yes, Kate, in wan moment I'll tak' it oot o' yer han', thankee, but stop till I get off this precious bonnet, for I declare, the win' got sae muckle into the coal-scuttle back o't comin' doon the road there that the strings nearly cuttit awa the

very breath o' my being. Here, pit it past, if you please, an' tak care o' the feathers, for they're jist preen'd in, as ye may see."

"That's no a rale ostrich feather, is't, Jean?"

"An ostrich feather! Fack, no! Ye'll no find Johnny Tow's modest relict sportin' an ostrich feather in her hat, Kate. It's jist a bunch o' hen's feathers. I pu'd them frae the wings o' a neibor's auld clockin' hen this mornin'."

"Weel, if that disna bate a'! An' what ava brocht ye roun' my way, Jean?"

"Oo, jist to congratulate ye on your fortin, ye ken. I wrote an' posted ye a most beautifu' and touchin' letter, tellin' ye I was comin', did I no?"

"Ay, Jean, but what was the use o' puttin' yersel sae much about owre a triflin' bit legacy that's no worth speakin' about?"

"Eh, me, Miss Kate, that my twa lugs should hear ye ca' ten thoosan pounds a trifling legacy!"

"Wha tell'd ye it was ten thoosan pounds, Jean?"

"Oh, ilka yin says't."

"Weel, ilka yin's wrang."

"Wrang!" gasped the relict.

"Ay, wrang; it was only ten pounds I was left, an' no' ten thoosan as the folks roun' aboot here threep."

"Eh, Miss Kate, but ye're a slee yin. But ye needna be ocht but confidential wi' me, for *I'm* no snokin' after yer fortin, guid kens; it's yer ain personal health an' comfort I'm concerned aboot, Kate, an' no yer ten thoosan pounds."

"Thankee, Jean; but I repeat it was only ten pounds that was left me, an' no a broon penny mair!"

"Lassie! lassie! the craws 'ill get ye for that big lee. But, d'ye ken, Miss Kate, I've brocht ye a grand present."

"An' what's that, Jean?"

"It's jist this, Kate" (unwrapping from a newspaper an old family-sized umbrella), "an' ye're no to be perneckity

modest, an' set up an affronted refusal. There! tak' it! a grand auld family umbrella, scarcely ever used, an' no a preen-pint the waur. Here, tak' it, Miss Kate, an' lang may ye wauchle thro' life under its protectin' hap!"

"Thankee, Jean; the umbrella's big awee, but it'll prove usefu' in a doonfa' o' rain."

"Ay, an' in simmer sunshine tae, Miss Kate; for, let me remind ye, it's yer ladyship's complexion that's needin' preservin', noo that ye've become a Missey o' fortin. An', believe me, Miss Kate, a better sunshade than that same auld family umbrella disna exist between Camlachie an' the Amerikeys."

"Ay, ay, Jean; but for ony sake gi'e owre that haver about my legacy, my ladyship, an' a' that nonsense. It's only ten pounds, an' no a penny mair, I've been left, tak' my honest word for't."

"Miss Dalrymple, the craws 'll get ye for that big lee. Weel, I'm sure it's neither here nor there to me whether it's ten pounds or ten thoosan'. Wi't, or wantin't, ye'll aye be dear to me, as the auld sang says; tho', for yer ain dear sake, Kate, I'd like to think it the big sum."

"Thankee, Jean; but, as I've got to answer for't, it's only ten pounds I've fa'n heir to, an' no a bawbee mair."

This was a staggerer to the relict, and completely changed, as if by a stroke of magic, the whole tenor of her mind and tongue.

"An' what in a' the earth—as I should use siccan words—what in a' the earth put it into yer heid to gang an' circulate siccan an ill-set, leein', punishable rumour—eh?"

"Me set afloat the rumour! On the contrary I've been tryin' to fecht it doon for six weeks back, an' there it is, as your presence here this day shows, as lively as ever."

"Whaur's my bonnet, Kate?" demanded the confounded relict.

"Yer bonnet, Jean! 'Od, ye're surely no gaun to hurry

awa' that way, withoot sayin' a word aboot yer ain health, or tellin' me what flowers ye're growin' owre Johnny's lamented grave—eh?"

"The deil ban you an' Johnny baith for a pair o' even-doon swindlers! Whaur's my bonnet, Kate? It's my bonnet I'm wantin', an' this vera moment, too. Tae think (tying on her bonnet) I've come sae faur for sae little—a perfect gowk's errand! 'Od, I'm jist fair bilin'. Whaur's that umbrella I gied ye?"

"What! the 'present' ye made me? Are ye gaun to tak' that awa' wi' ye tae?"

"I've a precious guid mind to tak' the shank o't across yer chafts, ye leein', deceitfu' auld besom that ye are! Draggin' me fowr miles thro' the mud to yer miserable door a' the way frae respected Camlachie; an' a' for jist naething, tae!" and seizing up the family umbrella with an angry *snap*, the Camlachie relict flounced out of the doorway in a precipitate rush for home.

"She's awa'!" reflected Kate; "but I've yae comfort left me—I've seen the last o' Tow Jean an' her auld family umbrella, an' that's yae blessin', if no twa."