

*THE MENDIN' O' JOHNNY MACFARLAN'S
LUM HAT.*

It was a staggering blow to Mrs. Macfarlan's pride as a respectable house-wife, when she was told that her next-door neighbor and enemy, Mrs. Howdie, had just taken a hoose at "the Lairgs" for a hale week; the more so, that she Mrs. Macfarlan was expected to stay at home during the Fair holidays, contenting hersel' wi' a penny voyage to Govan, or a hurl in the car the length o' Anderston and back again to the fit o' the auld Gleska Gallowgate. But that would never do!

Mrs. Macfarlan was a woman of considerable resource, and without unnecessary argument or delay, she at once resolved on checkmating Mrs. Howdie's "nesty, upsettin' pride," and constituting herself equal to the best o' them.

In this spirit Mrs. Macfarlan made up her mind to be conveniently "no-weel," so as to gain her point of getting a hale fortnicht doon the watter, nae less, and when once Mrs. Macfarlan, had definitely made up her mind on a discussed point—domestic or otherwise—her husband, Johnny Macfarlan, was about as good as nobody by way of a resisting buffer.

On awakening next morning Mrs. Macfarlan, poor woman, discovered that "her puir nerves were a' upset," and that naething but a complete change o' air would bring her round to herself again.

Johnny thocht different, and maintained, with considerable show of reason and argument, that her trouble was mostly imaginary, and that she would be all right next day.

But Mrs. Macfarlan had determinedly made up her mind to be ill, and ill she accordingly continued to remain, in spite of all Johnny's proffered herbs and arguments.

There was, therefore, nothing for it but just to submit, and make arrangements for giving poor Mrs. Macfarlan a hale fortnicht doon the watter. For no a single day less than "a hale fortnicht" would Mrs. Macfarlan under the circumstances consent to take.

It was thus agreed that Johnny's better-half and her family should proceed to Rothesay at the beginning of the Fair week, and should stay over the week following, as a means of restoring her suddenly upset health.

The next important matter was the arranging of the general family wardrobe, and that was a big job to handle; for the general family wardrobe, it must be confessed, required almost entire renewal, from Johnny's auld "lum hat" down to the wee'st bairn's shoon! As for Mrs. Macfarlan herself, she was jist on the parish for dress; and Johnny, poor man, was in a somewhat similar pathetic condition.

The situation was therefore very trying, not to say critical. The state of the family purse was anxiously

looked into, and it was found that after allowing so much for lodgings at Rothesay, so much for steamboat fares, and so much for loss of wages, there was only the limited sum of 7s. 9½d. to renew the general family wardrobe so as to make a presentable turn oot, and thereby spite Mrs. Macfarlan's twa bitter enemies and stair-heid neibors, Mrs. Howdie and Mrs. Draggletails.

Johnny, however, did not collapse in weak despair. The situation was indeed desperate, but was not beyond resourceful ingenuity and hope. Johnny had a native genius for arithmetical geometry, and it was destined to come in handy on this occasion, in the subdivision, extension, and minute expenditure of the precious 7s. 9½d., which was all the money that was at the immediate disposal of Mrs. Macfarlan, the worthy domestic treasurer.

"As for me," said Johnny, "I can gang vera weel as I am. My 'wardrobe's' no that ill."

"Yer hat's jist deplorable," answered Mrs. Macfarlan, "it needs turnin', like mines."

"An' nae shame tae't, Betty; it's nine-an'-twenty years, come Fair Friday, since I first wore it at oor waddin'. But, Betty, lass, ye surely dinna mean me to wear my auld lum hat at the coast—eh?"

"An' what for no, ye're surely no ettlin' to put on that ugly twa-faced kep (cap) wi' the skip baith back an' fore? If that's sae, I'll no stir yae fit oot o' the hoose. No, no, Johnny Macfarlan! the neebors maun see that ye're a weel-tooken-care-o', gaucy, respectable guidman; that ye've a wife that studies ye, an' that ye've a dress-hat to pit on wi' the best o' them, when occasion demands it."

"But it's in a deplorable condition, ye say," argued Johnny, "an' what's the yise o' sayin' ony mair about it?"

"It can be mended, Johnny; my summer 'straw' has been turn't twice't, an' gumm'd times withoot number; so can your auld hat, Johnny."

"But a man canna vera weel turn an' auld hat," retorted Johnny; "an' as for gumming't, why, of course, that's quite oot o' the question."

"Oo, but it disna maybe exactly need turnin', Johnny; a bit polish wi' the blacklead brush might restore its original gloss."

"Go you tae Dumbarton, Mrs. Macfarlan! Blacklead a Christian man's hat! Great Christopher! D'ye want to mak' a lookin'-gless o' the bowl o't?"

Oh, weel, Johnny, we'll see, we'll see," rejoined Mrs. Macfarlan, in a mollifying tone of voice. "Ye're an ingenious workman, Johnny Macfarlan, an' ye'll best see what can be done for yer hat when it's hauled oot wi' ither orras frae ablow the bed. But yer best hat ye must wear at the coast, mind you that! or no a single fit will I stir frae Gleska, doon the watter, or no doon the watter!"

The matter being thus summarily settled by Johnny's "ruling elder," the twa set oot on a visit to Paddy's Market on the Saturday nicht following, alang wi' some nine or ten of their twelve or thirteen weans, to spend in necessaries the 7s. 9½d. at their disposal.

Mrs. Macfarlan carried the purse, and Johnny carried the umbrella—and the wean. Mrs. Macfarlan therefore held the best end of the stick, and maintained undisputed possession of the same throughout the evening.

Reaching Paddy's Market, the display there shown was very ample, and at some points—particularly the bonnet-stands—was perfectly dazzling, and, indeed, "quite temptashous," as Mrs. Macfarlan graphically put it. And, electrified to the length of her ten finger tips, Mrs. Macfarlan nervously clutched her purse, as if she feared the immediate barter of its precious contents. The bonnets, in sober truth were just "quite lovely," and fair "brocht the watter tae the een."

"Eh, man, Johnny, jist you look at that!—there's a

perfect love o' a bonnet!—jist my rale taste! Eh, but I'd like a bonnet like that!”

“Ay,” drawled Johnny, “green silk, an' a white ostrich feather! Is't no jist raither a wee lood in the colours for a woman o' your age, Betty?”

“Oh, ay! onything's guid enough for me—yer puir neglected wife. I suppose ye'd ha'e the heart to see me wearin' an auld bauchle on my heid, wi' a blacking brush stuck on the tap o't for a feather, ye heartless monster that ye are! But I'll see the price o' that bonnet this vera nicht!”

“Oh, buy't if ye like; I'm jake-easy on't, Betty.”

Mrs. Macfarlan did not require much jibing to put her ambitious desire into execution. She at once priced the article, and afterwards proceeded to haggle about the purchase of it—a proceeding which the philosophic Johnny, profiting by former experiences, was able to eye with easy indifference.

Johnny stood aside, and for the space of fifteen minutes Mrs. Macfarlan contested the price demanded; and, at last, as Johnny more than guessed, he saw the “sale-wife” roll up the identical bonnet, and coolly hand it over to his worthy better-half.

“Weel, ye've bocht it, Betty,” was Johnny's resigned salutation as he stepped towards his elated spouse.

“Ay, Johnny; an' a splendid bargain I've gotten o't. She wanted 15s. for't, as weel she nicht; but I focht her doon to 5s. 11d.—a perfect thief's bargain at the price!”

“Let me see—5s. 11d. oot o' 7s. 9½d,” rejoined Johnny, “that leaves only 1s. 10½d. to renew me an' the weans!”

Having thus secured for herself a grand new bonnet, Mrs. Macfarlan warmly insisted on Johnny at once taking in hand the repair and renewal of his ain auld lum hat, jist by way of snoddin' himself up a bit, as a man with a defective hat, she maintained, could never be considered “dressed,” nae maitter what was his “pit on.” So that same night, Johnny instructed his worthy better-half to bring forth the hat.

Johnny broadly surveyed it; saw plainly its wasted nap, its long-departed style, its perished gloss, and the numerous long-standing cracks and bashes, which gave its entire circular surface the configuration of a well-defined map of Lanarkshire.

"Weel, what think ye o't, Johnny?"

"Weel, I'm no a prood man, Betty; but I'd prefer a hat showing fewer bashes, with a little more gloss on its surface, and with a less allowance of 'rim.' Besides, Betty, the rim, ye see's, parting company wi' the body o't," and Johnny, holding it up to the gaslight, showed truly that the rim was all but parted from the body.

"I'll shoo't thegither wi' a bit black threid, Johnny," suggested Mrs. Macfarlan.

"No; I ken a better way than that, Betty; I'll sort it mysel' wi' a bit gutta percha and a wee taet solution."

"Gutta percha an' solution, Johnny!" exclaimed Mrs. Macfarlan, with unfeigned astonishment.

"Ay; gutta percha an' solution, Betty! Jist ye haud on a wee, an' I'll show ye a bit clever magic," and at once Johnny began preparations for the mending of his auld lum hat, having some odd pieces of gutta percha at hand.

A guid strong fire being one of the first requisites of success, that commodity was put within his use without loss of time. Mrs. Macfarlan put some fresh coals on the fire while the bairns vigorously blew the bellows turn about.

As for Johnny himself, he was actively successful in getting a' thing ready for instant operation. In fact, so methodically and so exhaustively did Johnny go about the business, that his finished arrangements amounted to an obvious genius for organisation and would have secured his promotion at the Admiralty Office if sufficiently made known in that quarter.

The hat under repair was carefully and minutely "prospected," and the situation accurately studied. The rim, it

was true, was all but bidding good-bye to the body of the hat, but a thin strip of gutta percha on the top of a "lick of solution" would "cling the twa thegither nicely," and make "a grand, firm mend o't." So, at least, thought Johnny, and possessing the full courage of his sanguine convictions he at once began active mending operations.

The fire was now blazing finely, and sending out the heat of a miniature blast furnace. A small kitchen poker was rammed into the heart o't, while a fire-airn was sitting on the tap o't, and both articles were already glowing with positive heat. On the end of a fork the auldest laddie was holding against the heat of the fire a small bit of gutta percha, which was already curling and blistering into grand workable condition; while Johnny himself was busy "straiking" the melted solution roun' the inner edge of the rim of his hat with the point of his right fore finger, preparatory to firmly gluin't thegither with the gutta percha. The rest of the family were surveying operations from the centre of the floor with mixed exclamations of wonder and delight, while Mrs. Macfarlan was busy shoo'in' some "tears" in their newly-washed and ironed frocks and "peanies," in view of their coasting excursion on Fair Monday coming.

"Hand me that gutta percha, Bobbie," said Johnny, as he quickly but carefully put down the hat. "Quick! that's it!"

Getting the soft gutta in his hand, he rolled it into a long thin strip; and without a moment's loss of time twined it carefully round the bottom of the hat where the rim joined.

"Noo, Bobby, the poker oot o' the fire," continued Johnny, warming to his work like a true mechanic. "Ay, that's something like a heat; its jist perfect white. Whew! that was a bleeze!" he added, as the resinous gutta broke into flame under the strong heat of the poker.

Again and again Johnny applied the poker by way of smoothing the "jine," but invariably the melting gutta flamed up and caused him to desist.

"It'll prove a grand mend, Johnny," Mrs. Macfarlan ventured to remark, "if only the hat hands out."

"Hauds oot?" repeated Johnny, looking up inquiringly.

"Ay, disna tak' fire like, Johnny."

"Nae fear o' that, Betty; it's already been on fire an' oot again six or eight times the nicht. Hand me owre that ain aff the fire, Bobbie, an' lift it wi' a wat cloth roun' the handle, for I see even the handle's bleezin' het."

Bobby obeyed his parent's instructions to the letter, and Johnny at once applied the whole flat of the red-hot iron to the side of the hat by way of giving it a final polish and "nice general smooth-owre," as he styled it.

In a moment the sottering gutta-percha broke once more into flame, and, owing to the heated state of the hat and the extra surface of the hot iron applied, the flame refused to be puffed out. Almost instantly the whole hat was in a blaze, and completely upset by the cries of the children and the screams of Mrs. Macfarlan, Johnny losing his nerve threw the blazing hat holus bolus at the back of the fire. The disastrous result was certainly not reckoned on in the remotest way. The great heat of the fire instantly converted the whole hat into a mass of oily pulp, and with a sort of explosive puff it seemed to go bodily up the chimney in one mass of flame. Here was certainly an unlooked-for catastrophe, bad enough in itself certainly, but trifling when compared with the alarming sequel which immediately followed. In two seconds it was evident that the "lum" was on fire!

"Eh, mercy me, Johnny 'Macfarlan! what's this ye've dune?" screamed Mrs. Macfarlan, throwing her two hands aloft in perfect horror, "is't possible the lum's on fire?"

"Possible, Betty; it's a self-evident fact; spontaneous combustion, Betty, or something o' that sort, resulting frae a suddenly absorbed auld hat!" and the highly philosophic Johnny struck an attitude which looked an ingenious com-

promise between comedy and pathetically bleeding melodrama.

"The guid keep us a'!" cried aloud Mrs. Macfarlan, "we'll a' be burnt alive, as sure as we're breathin'! Oh, I wish I was in Abraham's blessed bosom this nicht!"

"Confound Abraham an' you baith, Mrs. Macfarlan!" was Johnny's spirited rejoinder. "Bring me the saut-box an' a pair o' blankets till I damp oot the lum; and look alive, Betty, before the hale land's on fire!"

There was in truth not a moment to lose. The "lum" was not only on fire, but was positively roaring with flames for its entire length—from the bottom upwards. In fact, so powerfully was the chimney in flames that the whole house was shaking with the vibration caused by the roaring draught that fiercely swept it.

"When did ye last get that vent soopit?" demanded Johnny, as Mrs. Macfarlan handed him the saut-box, his little soul roused into heroic authority by the exciting catastrophe; "when, I ask, did ye last get that vent soopit?"

"Only the ither day, Johnny."

"When, I simply ask?" re-demanded Johnny, vigorously thrusting at the same time several successive handfuls of salt up the chimney.

"Only aboot three years since."

"Is that a', Betty? I was guessing it hadna seen a sweep's brush this century. Bring me a pail o' watter, an' the blankets; the saut's worse than yisless."

"What, my guid Ayrshire blankets! Are ye clean daft, Johnny Macfarlan? I'll bring ye the watter, but no yae inch o' the blankets ye'll get to spread owre thae jambs, no even if it was to save the hale land frae the flames!"

"But I must get them," insisted Johnny, making a dash at the articles named.

"But ye'll no get them, Johnny," as firmly retorted Mrs.

Macfarlan, seizing at them in turn. And thus arose a domestic tug-of-war, as to the possession and disposal of the bed blankets, the issue of which, in view of Mrs. Macfarlan's superior size and weight, could neither be of doubtful nor protracted contest. But the heroic Johnny, if heavily out-weighted, was certainly not out-spirited. He was, in point of resolute courage, quite equal to the trying occasion.

"Let go my blankets, Johnny Macfarlan!" cried his large spouse, forgetting in her passion the calamity which was raging in the "lum," and pulling at her end of the disputed blankets most vigorously.

"I'll tear them in twa first!" retorted Johnny, equally oblivious to the progress of the conflagration in the chimney, also pulling with all his strength at his end of the stick—"I'll—I'll—I'll tear them in twa first!"

"Ye'll what, Johnny Macfarlan? O'd I'll tear ye!" And putting the whole weight and strength of her body into the tug, she whipped up Johnny clean off his feet and deposited him with a lightning swish at the opposite side of the kitchen. Johnny held determinedly on by the disputed blankets, however, and was presently swished back again to his former latitude, thus forcibly illustrating the Highland sergeant's military command, "As you wass!"

"If it's a tumblin' circus clown ye mean to mak' o' me, Betty," gasped Johnny, "I'll gie ye some stiff exercise."

"O'd, I'll clown ye!" retorted Mrs. Macfarlan; and swish—Johnny was once more deposited on the opposite side of the kitchen, much in the manner of a fly at the end of a fishing rod which is being actively whipped by an enthusiastic angler.

Suddenly, while the pair still violently wrangled, a rumbling noise was heard in the chimney, as if a bag of gravel was being emptied down the passage, and, the next moment, a pour of soot and water told too truly that some over-active sweep had descried the fire from his dingy

residence "up a back closs" somewhere, and that here was the frightful result—half a hundredweight of soot on the floor, liquidized with a bucket of water, which was quickly followed by a second, and even a third discharge, until poor Mrs. Macfarlan's abused floor was "jist fair soomin'!"

Struck with dismay, Mrs. Macfarlan yelled in perfect horror, while Johnny, equally astounded, let go his hold of the nether end of the blankets and blankly "glowered." The blankets thus released from Johnny's grasp got badly trailed in the soot and wet, which fair put the cope stane on Mrs. Macfarlan's accumulated distress, and she accordingly did everything hysterical except "fent"; and, but for the arrival on the scene of the offending sweep, she would very likely have chosen to conclude the amusing comedy in that legitimate feminine fashion.

"Three shullings, if you please, Mrs.," said the sweep, wiping some highly imaginary drops of sweat from his brow, "an' I'm entitled to it by law, as ye ken weel enough."

"For what?" replied Mrs. Macfarlan, "for fylin' the hoose? Clear oot o' here as quick's ye like, ye British nigger, if ye pit ony value on a hale skin; clear out, I say!"

"Three shullings for pittin' oot the fire—that's what I require," and the sweep stood largely on his small dignity.

"O'd, I'll three shullings ye, ye confounded vagabond! fylin' my hoose for nae ends nor purpose, an' to croon a', wantin' peyment for the impidence! O'd, I'll three shullings ye!" and flinging aside her blankets she caught up a hearth-broom and energetically pursued the astonished sweep round the apartment, who escaped her vigorous wrath only by seizing Johnny bodily, and so making a protecting buffer of him in warding off the blows dealt by his exasperated spouse.

"I'll summons ye for the money, auld wife," cried back the defeated sweep, as he made a hurried retreat from the place.

"Auld wife!" ca'in' me an auld wife!" yelled Mrs. Macfarlan, "an' me only thirty next Marti'mas!"

"Ye're sixty if ye're a day! and a dour auld Turk intae the bargain," was the sweep's parting shot.

Mrs. Macfarlan made a quick rush at her sooty reviler, but he was gone.

"He's awa' to tak' oot a summons," remarked Johnny, in a tone of voice touched with alarm.

"Let him gang, an' I'll mak' the chiel wha tries to serve it on us dance the Hieland fling on a hot plate! But, eh me! it's my guid Ayrshire blankets I'm like to greet owre." continued Mrs. Macfarlan, "they're fair ruined wi' soot an' dirty watter."

"An' what aboot my lost lum hat, Mrs. Macfarlan? The blankets are there in substance, as ye see, but whaur's my hat? I ask, and defeated Echo answers—'Where?'"

"Never mind yer hat, Johnny," said Mrs. Macfarlan, consolingly, "I'll knit ye a grand new worset Tam o' Shanter, wi' a red toorie on't as big as a turkey's egg, an', dressed in that, Johnny, the ekwal o' ye 'ill no be seen doon the watter next week between Gourock an' the Cumbraes."

And so ended the mending o' Johnny Macfarlan's auld lum hat.