

COMING HAME FOU.

GEORGE SHUTTLE was a handloom weaver in the auld Calton, of Glasgow. He was a man of an extremely douce, canny, and auld-fashioned type—a type of Scottish craftsmen, now all but passed away.

Geordie had a stick-leg, the result of an accident in early life, which added to rather than detracted from the humour of his interesting personality. Geordie was monomaniac on his stick leg. He nursed it like a baby, and found it useful in a variety of ways. His wife, Mattie, was a “managing” woman, and would have managed Geordie as a bit of the ordinary house furniture but for his stick leg, which he usually screwed off as a safe weapon of defence when Mattie was threatening hostilities. In this sense, the screwing-off of his locomotive appendage was to Geordie what the celebrated “Old Guard” was to the great Napoleon—a sort of final and unfailing go-in-and-win reserve force, the mere threat of which usually took the stiff starch out of Mattie.

“Anither word, Mattie, an’ aff comes the stick leg!”

That invariably was Geordie’s last sheet-anchor hope during any more than usually heavy domestic gale. The

wind commonly fell quiet after that, just like fair magic. The amusing circumstance I have now to tell refers to a certain occasion on which Geordie—worthy man!—came home “fou” from a Masons’ meeting one night, and his wife’s rather warm reception of him, with the scene which followed.

There are, perhaps, worse trials in life than a man coming hame fou on a Saturday night; but there are, at the same time, few trials which are so bitterly resented by the thrifty housewife, especially if the guidman happens to come home with his pouches pick’t bare, as is, alas! only too often the case in the circumstances.

Not that honest Mattie, the weel-faured and equally weel-meaning spouse of our homely hero, had often cause to complain on this sore score. Not at all. Geordie Shuttle was ordinarily a douce, weel-ordered, canny-gaun Christian, who took a “gless” and let it alone, as wise folks for the most part do. He was not quite immaculate, however, any more than his neighbour craftsmen, and the text of this chapter was occasioned by the recollection of Geordie’s home-coming from a Masons’ quarterly meeting one night more than half-a-century ago, as mixed as a handful of coppers, and seeing six ways at once.

Geordie’s presence outside the door of his house that night, just as the auld Parish Kirk bell in the vicinity was tolling out the solemn hour of twelve, was made manifest to his alarmed wife Mattie, by a series of unsuccessful and ludicrous attempts on the part of the old weaver to find the keyhole of the door.

Mattie, who had been waiting his delayed return with a mixture of anger and alarm, quickly rose to her feet and went towards the door, not quite certain whether the person outside was her foolish husband, or, dreadful thought, a midnight burglar!

She was very soon disabused of her nervous fears on the

latter score, however, although equally alarmed on another point. Placing her ear close against the door, she distinctly heard her husband say to himself—

“No, no, Maggie Glen; nae mair for me, my dear woman, if *you* please; no anither drap for me. If I was to gang hame this night wi’ jist the wee’st drappie in my left c’e, oor Mattie would pu’ a the feathers oot o’ my beid; no anither drap for me, if *you* please.”

Mattie started as if she had been suddenly shot at.

“Wha cood Maggie Glen be?” she quickly asked herself, “that was sae gracious wi’ the whisky jar—an’ anither wife’s man!”

Listening again, she distinctly heard Geordie say—

“Whaur’s that blessed keyhole? I’m hang’d if Mattie hisna filled up the keyhole o’ the door wi’ potty. A fine trick to play me! But I’m up to her wee bit game. She wants to mak’ me knock her up so as she’ll see what time I come hame, an’ in what specific condition I may happen to be in, so as she can lecture me accordingly. But she’ll no ken, no even if I should hae to tak’ the Clyde for’t this precious night.”

This said, Geordie turned on his left heel, or, more strictly speaking, on his stick leg, and made to leave the spot.

The next moment the door flew open, and a voice was heard—not exactly the persuasive voice of Maggie Glen, “my dear”—but the veritable voice of his wife Mattie, frozen into a hard, cold, cutting edge by the just anger of her jealous mind.

“George! George Shuttle! come back here this moment!” the voice came after him.

Instantly Geordie stopped short, like a suddenly overwound clock, with a sort of gasping snap.

“It’s Mattie’s heavenly-toned voice I hear,” he cautiously whispered to himself. “Lord! I’m in for’t noo! I’ll catch it hot!”

Wheeling about, Geordie attempted to steady himself on his best leg, keeping the "stick-yin" spinning round as a handy "balancer," in case the flagstones of the pavement should rise suddenly up and attempt, in an excess of affection, to kiss him on the brow.

"Weel, Mattie, my dear!" was Geordie's loving salutation, as he turned about and steadily faced his angry better-half.

Mattie cast a severe glance at him, surveyed his disordered externals for a moment, so to speak, and saw that it was, indeed, her own foolish husband, under the undue influence of drink, and visibly out of his usual douce and canny wits.

Yes, there was no mistake about the man, or the stick leg either. But the hat on his head? How came he by that strange hat, she wondered. It was not her Geordie's hat, whosever it might turn out to be. That was certain. Geordie invariably wore a woollen cap of her own thrifty knitting. And this was a hat—a veritable "lum hat," too! And, what was more mysterious still, it was positively a policeman's hat.

What could it all mean, Mattie wondered? It was the body, certainly, but not the hat of Esau!

It meant what Mattie did not, of course, just then know—viz., that Geordie had forgathered with a Highland policeman on the way home, and had shared with him a good mutchkin of whisky from a bottle which he had filled before leaving Maggie Glen's. The constable and our homely hero had grown so very gracious and confiding over the dram that in an excess of social humour they had actually exchanged hats; and what was very natural under the peculiar circumstances, on parting they had quite forgotten to restore to each other their exchanged headgear! And here, therefore, was the humiliating spectacle of douce, canny-gaun Geordie Shuttle knocking for admission at his own door at twelve o'clock at night, as fou's the Clyde, an', waur than even that, with a common toon-policeman's

hat on! The humour of the situation was intensified by the fact that Geordie was unaware of the distinction he was thus carrying aloft on his homely and unambitious head, having quite forgotten everything appertaining to the whole matter.

"Mattie, my dear, I was saying," the conscience-stricken husband at length ventured to repeat.

"Don't 'dear' me, George Shuttle," retorted Mattie, in a tone of offended pride. "Keep that fine word for Miss Margeret Glen, whaever she may be, ye vaigabond!"

"*Ha, ha, ha!*" laughed aloud Geordie. "Maggie Glen, the snuffy auld brewster wife wha supplies the dram. Is that whaur this sherp an' snelly side-win' is blawin' aff o'? H'm! a puir enough bit caunle en' to licht a fire at!"

"Ay, an' a bonnie dram she's gien ye, atweel, that keeps ye spinnin' about there, at twal o'clock o' nicht, like a schule laddie's peerie newly aff the string; an', waur than that, sen's ye hame here wantin' yer seven senses, an' wi' a polis-man's hat on yer heid! A bonnie dram, atweel!"

Geordie at this juncture put up his hand to his head, and sure enough there, indeed, was the policeman's veritable tile sticking up on the back of his rather mixed head, giving him for all the world the appearance of a craw-bogle which had just newly walked away from some suburban potato field.

The revelation was a staggerer to the man of yarn, but he was equal to the occasion.

"*Wheesht! wheesht!* Mattie; if ony o' the twa o's has a richt to fa' oot wi' ither, it's me wi' you," he resumed with suddenly-acquired spirit, the drink giving his canny nerves a sort of heeze up on the dyke, so to speak.

"George Shuttle!" said Mattie, by way of very stern reproof. She always said George, and never Geordie, when her "spunk was up," as our pawky hero put it. But it wouldn't draw this time.

"Oh, ye may 'George' me frae this till Martinmas, if ye

like, Mattie," retorted the husband, still maintaining his distant position outside the house door. "Of the twa o's, Mattie, ye're maist in the blame, I maintain."

"*Me* maist in the blame?" indignantly exclaimed Mattie.

"Undoubtedly," said Geordie, with as much authoritative solemnity as his swimming head would allow him to summon up. "Wha filled the keyhole o' the door wi' potty to keep me frae getting in this check key, eh?"

Mattie gazed at her husband and the article he displayed in his hand in severe silence.

"Ha, woman, I have ye nately there, eh!"

"D'ye ca' that a door-key?" sneered Mattie in return.

Geordie looked at the article he was holding so triumphantly in his right hand, and lo! *it was a cork-screw!*

"On second thochts, Mattie, I think it will not be advisable to unduly protract this discussion, considerin' the time o' nicht," remarked the defeated husband.

"Oh, yes; a fine exkuse, efter comin' hame drunk wi' a polisman's hat on yer stupid heid, an' a cork-screw in yer han' for a door-key, nae less!"

"Haud a bit, Mattie; haud a bit, if you please. There's no muckle wrang wi' the hat, as far as I can see, eh?"

"An' that's scarcely across the brig o' yer ain nose the nicht," thrust in Mattie with keen sarcasm.

"There's no muckle the maitter wi' the auld hat, I was sayin', and still less wrang wi' the heid that's noo in it. An' as for being drunk, I'll no thole to be ca'd drunk, sae lang's I can keep my twa feet firmly. But I'll cairry this interesting question to the back-shop for further discussion the morn's forenoon. Meantime I'll tak' the inside o' the door the nicht, Mattie, wi' your gracious permission, for my heid's whirlin' roon like a bit paper on a windy day. But, Mattie, dinna ye say I'm drunk when I'm fair, square, an' sober; for that's what I'll no thole, fecht me wha likes."

"No drunk?" sneered Mattie, as she followed her husband

into the house. "Look at yer condition, an' jist look at the state o' yer claes; glaured frae heid to fit, an' a great rent in yer widden leg that a sixpence worth o' glue 'll no sowther."

"It was bitten by a dowg," thrust in Geordie.

"An' as for yer heid," continued Mattie, with increasing sarcasm, "it's clean reversed roon', an's a' tapsalteerie. Ca'in an auld cork-screw a door key! an' comin' hame wi' a polisman's hat stuck on the back o' yer heid, lookin' for a' the worl' like an auld bauchle stuck on a pole for the bairns to pap stanes at. There's fine, douce, respectable conduct for a kirk-elder—sobriety and rale fine first-rate common-sense, bonnily illustrated and exemplified. To complete the picture ye only want one thing, Mister Shuttle, noo that I see ye in the licht."

"An', pray, what's that, Mistress Shuttle, if *you* please?"

"Yer pouches turned outside in, an' yer breeks drawn on wrang-side foremost," answered Mattie with smiling sarcasm.

"Go you to Dumbarton! I'm as square an' richt this nicht as sixpence o' coppers—no a bawbee short in the coont."

"May be?" retorted Mattie, "but I dinna believe ye hae sense enough left to blaw oot a lichtit caunle."

"It wad tak' a lot to extinguish you, onyway, as I ken to my cost this nicht," boldly thrust in the man of yarn, divesting himself of his coat and suddenly flinging himself on the top of the bed, his temper visibly on the rise.

"I declare if the madman's no gaun to bed wi' his buits on, and a polisman's hat on his heid!" exclaimed Mattie, clasping her two hands together in astonishment.

"Confound you and the hat baith," replied the wroth husband, and, taking sharp aim, he made the discussed hat spin in the direction of Mattie's head, who cleverly ducked in neat time, and so saved her sonsie countenance from abuse.

“Drunk! ay, dangerously, murderously, drunk!” was Mattie’s bitter retort.

“Anither word, Mattie, an’ aff comes the stick leg!”

“Oh, mercy! murder—polis!” yelled Mattie, knowing that if the stick leg once came off she was in for a chase round the kitchen. “Polis!”

“A’ richt, Mattie; if the polisman’s absent, ye’ve his hat beside ye, at the least, an’ that’s certainly better than jist naething ava’, if it’s no very muckle after a’. Meantime, I’m for a sleep, my dear. Till the morn’s mornin’ *ta ta*, or as the polite letter-writers say, ‘till we next meet.’—Yours most respectfully,

“GEORDIE SHUTTLE.”

This said, our pawky-minded hero kicked off his one boot, drew the bedclothes up to his chin, and, composing his somewhat excited nerves as best he could, he was very soon in the arms of Morpheus, his after dreams being acutely vivified with many curious sensations born of Maggie Glen’s potent whisky, the main picture of which was a full-sized front view of his angry spouse solemnly reading the moral law to him, the background being awkwardly filled up with something remarkably like a badly crushed policeman’s hat!
