

WHEN IS A MAN FOU?

“AN’ hoo dae ye feel yersel’ this mornin’, Tammass?” was Peggy Wilson’s somewhat satirical salutation to her husband one mornin’ lately, as she placed his bowl of porridge on the table before him; “no very weel, I’ll warrant ye.”

“I feel sae awfu’ bad owre the wee tait I had last nicht that I’m jist tryin’ to realize what it wad be to be actually fou,” Tammass made answer.

“An’ was ye no really fou last nicht, think ye, Mister Tammas ?”

“No, I was not, Mistress Wilson ; nae mair than you are this minute.”

“Weel, that bates a’ !” explained Peggy, with manifest surprise. “A man that coodna, for the life o’ him, keep his twa feet thegither, an’ was seein’ nae less than six different ways at yince, to say he wasna drunk ! It fair bates a’ !”

“That’ll dae, Peggy : no anither word, if you please. We’ll drap the domestic anchor there, an’ lie each to our ain moorings, as the foreign sailors frae Dumbarton say.”

Having thus summarily disposed of his wife, Tammas thought he would next try to finally dispose of the question at issue by asking in succession every chance acquaintance he met that day — “When is a man drunk ?”

“Now, the first man he chanced to meet that day was Johnny Rhymer, the drapers’ poet. Johnny was a wasted genius who had set out on the ocean of literature with his eye on the laureateship, but had early got firmly moored to the whisky barrel, and had never got beyond it. Johnny got a living by writing poetical advertisements for the city drapers, spent his days in the public house, and his nights in the model lodging-houses of the town, and being a man of a very warm imagination, he was fairly happy in the contemplation of his lot.

“Now,” thought Tammas to himself, “here comes Johnny Rhymer, the poet, he shood be able to answer the question satisfactorily, if ony man shood.”

The next moment the two friends were confronting each other.

“Guid mornin’, Johnny. I’ve a question to put to ye, an’ I think ye’re as able as ony man to settle the point.”

“If ye wad kindly pit the pint inside a pewter stowp, whatever it may turn oot to be, I’d settle it wi’ the greatest

pleasure," said the poet, smacking his parched lips very suggestively.

"By an' bye, Johnny. But my question is this—When is a man really drunk?"

"Well," replied the poet, "I consider a man unmistakably drunk—

When hiccups interrupt his broken talk,
And the domestic plank he cannot walk:

An exalted mental condition, by the way, to which I am seldom permitted to transport myself—more's the pity!—for, like all true poets, I am poor, very poor, and have to keep up the divine steam on random drinks of sma' beer and copious libations of treacle swats.

Such is the modern poet's fate, alas!
Such his most cruel and pathetic luck:
He asks for bread, perhaps also a "glass,"
And at his gentle head a murderous brick they chuck!

The next man that Tammas met that day was auld Rab Morrison, the blacksmith, so, without any ado, Tammas put the question to him direct, "When is a man drunk?"

"It's an involved question," answered the blacksmith, "an' has depths in't like the Atlantic that nae ordinary lead can fathom. Some wad hae't that a man's drunk when he canna rise an' walk hame; ithers say a chiel's fair fou when he canna successfully bite his ain thoomb; some ithers again haud an' maintain that a man's no' strictly sober when his tongue 'll no' lie still. But if that's the case, when are the women folks sober? (*Hear, hear, from Tammas.*) It's generally admitted, however," continued the blacksmith, "that a man's no' strictly sober when he accosts a pump-well on the roadside, warmly shakes it by the handle, ca's it his auld frien' an' social brither, an' ends the comedy by tryin' to licht his pipe at the spout."

Our friend Tammas here admitted that the blacksmith had scored a decided point.

“But relative to the humour of the dram,” continued the blacksmith, “let me here tell you the funny story of Wee Johnny Seam, a dram-loving tailor, whose stature was extremely little, and whose head was twisted round so far as to lie on his left shoulder, the result of an accident at birth. Johnny was a confirmed tippler, going as far on every social occasion as his own pocket or a cronie’s generosity would allow of. He had been drinking one night in a small tavern in the Trongate, and on rising to take the road home he found himself prettily mixed about the upper storey. The experience, however, was in no sense a new one to the wee tipping tailor, who steadied himself on his two feet most heroically, and refusing help, and even well-timed advice, took the road home like a soldier. Whatever was in the dram that night, it seemed to act soporifically on the wee tailor’s senses, for on reaching the middle of the auld Stockwell Brig Johnny sat down with his back leaning against the stone parapet, and fell fast asleep. Presently a couple of wayfarers passed by, and seeing the wee body sitting on the cauld stanes, a’ thrawn and doobled up like a bit o’ broken stick, the yin said to the ither—

“A sair fa’ this wee chap’s gotten; his neck’s fair set, I fear; let’s lift him.”

This they tried to do, and having sat him bolt upright, they then tried to twist round his thrawn head straight.

“Stop! stop!” shouted the wee tailor, waking suddenly up; “wad ye thraw my neck like a hen’s, ye murderous rascals?”

“Steady a moment, my wee mannie! steady!” said yin o’ the twa operators, and—crack! roond once more they wrenched the wee tailor’s thrawn heid, who, now thoroughly awakened to a true sense of the situation, again yelled aloud—

“Stop, lads, stop! leave my heid alane; *it sits aye that way! it sits aye that way!*”

“Man,” said our frien’ Tammas, with a laugh on his honest face as broad as the Clyde at Dumbarton, “I can tell ye as guid a yin as that aboot Weaver Wull, o’ Parkhead. Wull, ye maun ken, had an awfu’ love for the dram, an’ greed wi’t like his mither’s milk. Now Wull, as was too often the case, happened to get fearfu’ fou one night in the Auld Nightingale Tavern, at the heid o’ the Gleska Sautmarket. In forging his way home east to Parkhead, Wull felt so forfochten, and so completely dead tired, that he sat down on the road in a quate corner, and, leaning his back against a dyke, was soon fast asleep. Some young Camlachie blades, seeing Wull snoring soond asleep, quickly resolved to tak’ a rise oot o’ him, so they gently carried him to a dark underground cellar in the neighbourhood. Getting some phosphorus frae a druggist’s apprentice, they rubbed it freely on their own and on Wull’s hands and face, and then rudely wakened him up. Wull, seeing the diabolic state he was in, inquired fearfully—

“Whaur am I?”

“Ye’re deid,” said one of the jokers in a solemn voice.

“Good Lord! hoo long hiv I been deid!”

“A fortnicht,” was the ready answer.

“An’ are ye deid, too?” anxiously inquired Wull.

“That’s so,” again came the ready replv.

“An’ hoo lang hiv you been deid?”

“Three months.”

“Then,” said Wull, quickly recovering his worldly appetite, “ye’ll be much better acquaint hereaboot than I am; hae, there’s a shillin’; awa’ oot an’ see if ye can bring us in half-a-mutchkin, for I’m spittin’ white sixpences, an’ my heid’s gaun roon’ as fast’s a coach wheel rinnin’ to a hog-manay marriage.

“Very good,” laughed the blacksmith with the rest, “but for a still funnier mixing o’ the mental mortar, take this story of two social imbibers:—A pair of worthy Glasgow

bailies, rather fond of their toddy, retired from their regular house of call to a quiet spot in Glasgow Green one fine evening, where they sat down on a bench to enjoy their favourite beverage alone, having previously supplied their coat-pockets with a sufficient quantity of liquor. After imbibing pretty freely, they both fell asleep where they sat. The night was dark and starless, and about midnight one of the sleepers rose off the seat with the laudable intention of properly retiring to rest. Not knowing his whereabouts, he wandered blankly about the Green for a while, groping in the dark for the side of the room, that he might thereby feel his way to the door. Failing of his purpose, he ultimately stumbled over his still sleeping companion, whom he rudely awoke, remarking—

“Surely, Bailie, this is an awfu’ big room, for, hang me, if I can find the door, though I’ve been graipin’ for’t for the last half hour.”

“I ken naething about the size o’ the room,” hiccuped his brither-ronie, “but yae thing’s certain (looking up to the sky), *it has a most tremendous heich ceilin’.*”

“Then the point o’ the discussion comes to what?” asked our amused and slightly confused friend, Tammas.

“To this,” answered the sensible blacksmith, “that a man’s never strictly sober when he’s beyond the domestic teacup, an’ that he’s fair drunk-fou when he canna fin’ the keyhole o’ his ain door, hings up his buits on twa separate hat-pegs, throws his hat on the floor, puts his clothes to bed instead o’ himsel’, an’ finally throws himsel’ doon on the fender till next mornin’. Under such conditions, there can be little rational doubt that a man’s geyan weel on, as the sayin’ is, if no completely fou.”

Our friend Tammas admitted the point, and so ended the amusing discussion—“When is a man fou?”