

COUPER SANDY.



HIS UNDERGRADUATE CAREER.

It was in his schoolboy time that my acquaintance with Sandy Mutch began. We two sat, with several others, on the same form, and had our sympathies stirred in common against what we deemed the harsh and unfeeling spirit that animated the pedagogue to whose rule we were subjected. Not that Sandy and his immediate companions were in all things precisely alike as it concerned their tastes and capacities, or that their dread of an application of the tawse sprung always from similar causes. The dominie himself would make a distinction. Against certain of us his complaint mainly was that of indulgence in too frequent fits of trifling (alas! poor man, he never fully found out the extent to which that habit was carried), and consequent failure to do the work one might easily have done. So said the dominie, and doubtless with perfect truth. His unvarying allegation against Sandy was that he was simply an incorrigible dunce, who neither could nor would learn his tasks—a condition of things that was to the dominie a real affliction; for somewhat slovenly and unscientific as his methods were, it grieved him to train up a lad who could not even make a decent show of concealing his ignorance.

And how far soever the dominie's opinion regarding the one set of his pupils may have been correct, or the opposite, there really seemed to be substantial grounds

for believing that his conclusions concerning Sandy Mutch's capacity as a pupil were essentially sound. Sandy had no clerkly tastes or leanings whatever. As a reader he was fearfully deficient, and his efforts at spelling reduced the dominie to despair. In arithmetic it was just a case of absolute propulsion through some of the simpler rules ; but even at his most mature stage he got hopelessly aground at the "Rule of Three," and there lay high and dry, without once obtaining a glimmering of what it was all about. Writing he did moderately well, as far as fashioning the mere letters went, but there his old habit came in again. He could not but mis-spell, even with the copy line before him ; when it was absent, the grotesque violence done to the recognised orthography was bewildering to look at, and caused the "Maister" frequent paroxysms of anger and disgust.

Curiously enough, Sandy Mutch had a sort of faculty in the way of technical memory. And thus in answering questions in the Catechism, if too strict inquisition were not made after a distinct and literal rendering, he would occasionally rattle off a sort of vague paraphrase that in its rough contour and likeness to the sound of the characteristic words bore a strong general resemblance to the real answer. Any analysis that demanded "meanings" of course threw him completely out, to say nothing of the "proofs," which the dominie prided himself on having been the first in our Presbytery to compel his scholars to tackle, and which Sandy Mutch found utterly beyond his powers.

Well, there could be no doubt of it ; Sandy Mutch, on the scholastic side of him, was certainly a dunce. Outside the school he seemed to possess no very striking characteristics. His temperament would, I imagine, have been deemed phlegmatic. A lumbering, uncouth sort of lad ; willing enough to take a share, more or less, in any rough or mischievous enterprise going on, but without sufficient energy or recklessness to be a

leader. His tendencies were, on the whole, toward those occupations that could be carried on without much physical effort ; and, in particular, he had a decided taste for bargain-making, as it went on among a certain section of his schoolfellows. In this connection Sandy was the subject of some envious talk occasionally. It was known that, by a system of judicious barter, he had become the possessor of almost the finest set of "bools" going amongst his contemporaries ; and then, not to speak of other and minor transactions, while he had come to school with merely a "Life-knife"—cost fourpence-halfpenny, as all the world knew—supplied to him by paternal outlay, the winter "raith" was not half over when there was in his possession, in exchange for the Life-knife and sundry other very inconsiderable articles, a real "Jockteleg gullie," erstwhile owned by one of the bigger loons ; and it was a patent fact that a gullie like it could not have been bought under eighteenpence.

Robbie Mutch, the village souter, was a talkative, intelligent, outspoken little man ; as village souters often are ; not devoid of intellectual keenness, and much given to political and theological discussion when he found suitable companionship. His wife was a large flabby woman, the reverse rather of intelligent—only she had a power of incessant talk of a gossiping, credulous, and even superstitious sort. And in virtue of her mere physical bulk, and this power of uttering herself with a kind of irrepressible clangour, she dominated the souter in a much greater degree than could have been expected on any grounds of reason. The souter's family took mainly after their mother, not after the souter himself ; and in the case of Sandy, their only son, this was quite marked. He had his mother's physique very distinctly, and also his mother's aptitude for hearsay. Beyond that, his capacity, in the direction of any of the arts by which man's life is sustained, and still more, as indicated, of literary acquirement,

had not hitherto shown itself to any good purpose whatever.

The souter was disappointed. He had early concluded that Sandy's lack of manual dexterity, not to speak of his lack of interest in the craft, unfitted him for successful application to the awl and lapstone. And though he would have willingly stretched a considerable point to give him as ample a share of schooling as he possibly could, and so push him forward into some of the learned professions, he saw that that too was utterly hopeless. "Oor Sawney winna brak' the clergy ony wye," was the somewhat bitter remark addressed by Robbie Mutch to his wife, when the point occasionally came up.

But the time had come when Sandy must do something for himself in the way of earning a livelihood.

"Aw'm seer, man, ye mith hae patience wi' the laddie; he's but a bairn yet," argued Mrs. Mutch when the souter had raised the question.

"Patience, 'oman! Fat for? Fat gweed's he deein'?—a nickum that thinks naething o' truein' the skweel ilka ither day, an' gyaun awa' takin' minnons i' the burn wi' an aul' creel, or colleaugin' wi' idle company, instead o' leernin' s lessons?"

"Hoot, that dominie has nae boun's wi' 'im! Fat for wud he gar creaturs gae on wi' nae deval till they war blin' an' dottl't wi' leernin'? Sawney badena awa' fae the skweel a' last ouk, 'cep on Tyesday an' Saturday; an' aw'm seer, man, he wud hae nae gryte miss for a' the time."

"He's nae the best judge o' that; and he kent weel aneuch 't he ocht till 'a been at the skweel, fan the maister taul' 'im that he hedna ae single word o' s lessons."

"An' him lickin' the creatur till 's vera fingers wus nearhan' peel't! Fatna a laddie cud get lessons an' s gardies stounin' wi' aiven doon ill-eesage like that? It's aneuch to gi'e 'im a mischief, I'm seer.

"Buff an' nonsense, 'oman; gin the maister wud lay

on the tag twice as weel, it wud be fat he's sair need-in'," said Robbie Mutch, somewhat savagely.

"Keep me, man!" exclaimed Mrs. Mutch with a semi-hysterical accent and gesture, "an' that's the wye that ye gae on! Weel, weel, aw mith speak to you aboot onything o' the kin'! Aw'm seer it's aneuch to fleg lessons oot o' a creatur's heid, to hear's vera nain fader speakin' that gate."

"They mith get lessons an' gae to the skweel tee that can mak' oot to herry craws' nests, an' traik aboot for oors i' the feedles deein' mischief," said Robbie, in a milder key, as became the exigency that had emerged.

"Wasna ye never a laddie yersel', man, that ye wud hae the vera hert ca'd oot o' the littleane, tetherin' 'im till a bare dask the lee lang day, an' keepin' 'im as eident at a stent's gin he war a man o' foorty?" asked Mrs. Mutch, pathetically.

"Aw'm seer that loon hisna been three days rinnin' at the skweel sin the gweed weather cam' in," replied Robbie, parrying the personal appeal.

"An' foo cud ye expeck that creaturs wud like to be chaumer't up fae morn to even, gweed day an' ill, man, 's gin they war as mony bedalls nae able to luik owre a door?"

It was impossible for the souter to make much of the argument, especially as his wife was again quite composed, and prepared to go on as long as he might find convenient and agreeable. But the souter had made up his mind that Sandy must be set to some useful work. And taking the youth by himself he submitted his proposal to him, which was, that summer being now at hand, Sandy should allow himself to be engaged as herd-boy to some of the neighbouring farmers. Now, although Sandy very heartily disliked the business of scholastic training, and had been tempted to desert the shrine of learning too frequently of late, on very doubtful pretences, in favour of employments that seemed more congenial to him, he was not a positively stubborn

or disobedient youth ; and as the proposed scheme of becoming a herd seemed to offer certain attractions, beyond that of freeing him of the growingly distasteful restraint of the school, he readily enough fell in with it. At an early opportunity thereafter he was engaged to herd the cattle of the farmer of Bowbutts accordingly.

CHAPTER II.

THE HERD LOON.

THE herd loon, *sui generis*, has become extinct ; and improved farming is responsible for it. With high cultivation and the reclamation of waste lands, the practice of enclosing grew. The style of the cattle, too, was changed. They began to speak of the "Teeswater," which by-and-by they called the shorthorn, and other pure breeds ; and these dainty animals were supposed to thrive better when kept in carefully fenced fields than roaming at large under charge of the herd loon, and restrained from straying into corn and turnip sections, and the like forbidden places, through dread of his club.

In my early time it was different. Fenced fields were the exception ; and the mixed multitude of native bred cattle on each farm—at any rate, the cows and young cattle—were turned out day by day in a straggling troop to graze, now on the "intoon rigs" during the early forenoon hours, and, later in the day, on the "oot feedles," where arable and waste land alternated in picturesque variety. The office of the herd, if duly performed, was by no means a sinecure. Over each separate animal, individually, great and small, the herd must exercise a certain moral discipline, alike for its sake and his own ; for when it was otherwise, and they came to treat with utter disregard his loud calls to "Keep back !" and to "Come in owre !" and could be called to order only by a vigorous use of the club, propelled with all the force of the herd loon's right

arm against their ribs ; or, still worse, a fusillade of stones pitched at them, to the danger of their limb bones, the beasts got demoralised and learnt to "range" as opportunity offered, in a fashion destructive both to the herd's comfort and their own well-doing as profitable stock for the herd's master.

The herd's club merits a passing word of notice. It was in the fashion of a policeman's baton, but bigger : a round stick roughly cut into shape, with a slight indication of a handle at one end. And to make the club serve its purpose completely there was cut out near the handle a mystic figure, something like an ill-fashioned monogram, known as a "meltie bow," which, it was understood, saved the club from inflicting harm on the cattle if it chanced to strike them below the belt, as it were ; also a rude figure of the herd himself, and in front of him certain symbols, thus :—

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The inscription on the club represented "Jockie an's owsen," and the full interpretation was this :—

Twa afore ane, an' three afore five ;
 First twa, an' syne twa, an' four comes belyve ;
 Noo ane, an' than ane, an' three at a cast ;
 Double ane, an' twice twa, an' Jockie at the last.

Such was the herd's emblem of office. By whom the symbols and legend which it bore were devised, is unknown to me.

It must be owned that as a herd loon, Sandy Mutch turned out but poorly. True it was that the open air freedom of the herd's life, as compared with the close confinement of the schoolroom, had its own charm—if one could only have had combined with that perfect and entire freedom of action according to the dictates of one's own tastes and impulses. But even at herding that might not be. Nay, the very nature of herding

implied the virtual surrender of the reasoning individual desire of the herd to the general instinctive preferences of the herded in all things right and lawful. An abnegation of one's self in their interest had to be made; and in honest performance of duty the virtues of unwearying patience, vigilant care, and a sympathetic apprehension of the bovine nature and needs had to be day by day exercised.

In the two first of these virtues, at any rate, Sandy Mutch was conspicuously deficient. For the quiet and sober continuousness of his new occupation, in truth, neither his training nor natural habits had well fitted him; and thus his herding was marked by "fits and starts" of attention at one time, and of utter inattention and idleness at another, which accordingly put his master, the farmer of Bowbutts, in great wrath.

"Aw say, that loon wud provoke a vera saunt, a't a body can say till 'im. Fat does he mean girdin' the beasts into the barest neuk o' the faul'ies that wye!" and Bowbutts, putting his right hand up to his jaw, shouted a powerful shout to "Wyn them doon the rigs, min, b' the side o' the corn!"

The herd and his cattle were half-a-mile off; but Bowbutts's lungs were of stentorian power, and it was evident the sound they had supplied his vocal organs with motive power to emit was distinctly heard, for the herd, who had been stretched at full length on the pasture, consulting his own ease and comfort, was seen at once to move in the direction of doing what he was bid.

"He's a weary ill herd that widdifu," continued Bowbutts. "Aw'm seer he mith'a kent to lat them faur they wud get a gweed bite the day, to hae the creaturs weel fill't that I'm takin' to the market."

"Deed, man," said Bowbutts's wife—it was to her he addressed himself—"Sawney's owre easy min'et to pit 'imsel' muckle about, oonless he be weel tell't aboot it. But he has gweed can amo' beasts fan he likes, f'r a' 'at."

"He's a sweir howffin ; that's fat he is," replied Bowbutts. "Little to me wud pit 'im fae the toon."

"An' fat better wud ye be o' that, man? Ye canna dee wantin' a herd," said the goodwife.

"I've a gweed min' to sen' word till's fader, an' lat 'im ken fat aw think o' 'im ; eeseless nickum !"

"Gae ye awa' an' rank yersel' than ; ye'll get yer shavin' leems i' the skelfie ahin' the saut backit, an' yer sark o' the heid o' the drawers ; an' I'll get the beasts worn in aboot in a filie."

Bowbutts did as he was bid ; and the goodwife took the trouble to put herself in communication with the herd, to whom she forthwith imparted various judicious counsels in view of the duty before him that day ; that, namely, of accompanying his master to market with certain cattle picked from the herd for sale, and which it behoved him accordingly to have well filled of food before commencing the journey.

In the prospect of getting off to the fair an hour or two thence, with Bowbutts riding on his pony, and himself driving four rough "stirks" in front of him, which had just been pressed on his attention, Sandy Mutch felt a distinct elation of spirits ; for he had much desired to vary his existence by some such experience. And when the other cattle had been housed, and they were fully started on their three-mile journey, he addressed himself to his task with a zealous earnestness that contrasted strongly with the inert and perfunctory style of his herding. The stirks, unaccustomed to be so driven, got wondrously excited. They scampered hither and thither, and leapt over the lower fences right and left, seeking the companionship of other cattle that they had sighted as they went along. But Sandy followed the chase with a will and to purpose, for while he ran vigorously, his tactical skill in out-manceuvring the errant stirks when they once and again attempted to double and force their way homeward, astonished, and nearly excited the articulate ad-

miration of even Bowbutts himself. And it was the same all through the hubbub of men and beasts during their stay in the fair. Sandy skilfully generalised his lot, kept them in the proper selling attitude, "wi' their heids to the brae, laddie," as Bowbutts had hinted to him, and even put in a fit word with would-be purchasers, when occasion demanded, during his master's temporary absence or engrossment in some incidental haggle. In short he gave unquestionable evidence of being in his element throughout; not excepting the interesting passage at the end, when Bowbutts having sold the last of the stirks, and got the lot clear off his hands, allowed Sandy to accompany him into the crowded canvas tent and partake slightly, while he discussed a final bottle of ale and a dram with a few of his cronies before setting out for home.

But as Bowbutts could not and did not go to the market every day, and as tending the cattle at home was not a duty to be well performed by merely intermittent effort, Sandy Mutch's character as herd, notwithstanding his undoubted success on the market day, was not in the least permanently bettered. Only this was noticeable, that Sandy had, with wondrous facility, taken a very broad and firm grip of what might be called the general principle of dealing in cattle. To his neighbour herd loons, with whom a good deal too much of his time was frequently passed, he expatiated at any length on the great sums of money that might be turned over in that way; and even uttered with confidence his opinion on the quality, weight, and other distinguishing particulars of given specimens of the bovine race that had come under his notice.

Meanwhile, Sandy Mutch, as has been said, was earning the title of a bad herd; and it was little comfort to the souter, as time went on, to find not only that Bowbutts declined a continuation of his services next season, but that the master to whom he had actually been engaged, before the summer was over

mulcted him of good part of his fee in consideration of damage inflicted on a neighbour's corn crop through certain gross acts of carelessness on Sandy's part.

"That loon!" exclaimed the souter, "he'll cairry a meal pyock yet, ere a' be deen, or ca' the kwinttra sell-in' besoms. He'll never mak's breid at nae honest han'ywark;" and it really seemed but too likely.

When Sandy Mutch had out-grown the herding stage, his promise of future usefulness did not seem greatly to improve. His father had long ago signified his belief that Sandy was dull in the head; and when his mother, whose belief in the lad was yet unshaken, suggested the expediency of his learning, if not the shoemaker trade, then some other skilled craft, the souter declared, with still stronger emphasis than before, that Sawney had "nae han's," and it was no use people "herryin' themsel's an' thrōwin' awa' gweed siller upon 'im." The only path, therefore, that seemed open to Sandy, as the souter viewed it, was that of an "orra man" about the farm; and in point of fact such was the capacity, varied by an occasional bout as an inferior and intermittently employed day labourer, in which he spent the next few years of his life.

CHAPTER III.

THE COUPER—PRELIMINARY ESSAYS.

INFERIOR service rendered by Sandy Mutch, led naturally enough to inferior engagements obtained by him, and, of course, inferior wages resulting therefrom. He was not at all unfrequently out of employment, as has been already said, and being equally out of cash, he simply loafed about at home for the time being, duly attending country markets and all similar gatherings within reasonable distance, in search of interest and amusement. It frequently occurred to Sandy that trading in some shape in these markets would form a most congenial sphere of operations; but, then, he had no capital, and his credit among the whole range of his friends and acquaintances was not equal to a five-pound note.

At last a crisis came that was destined to direct Sandy Mutch's whole future course in life. Sandy had engaged himself as servant to a man of no ascertainable character in respect of moral temperament and habits; and after he had for a few weeks endeavoured to fulfil his engagement, the man of no particular character, in a fit of unreasoning fury, saw good to curse and swear at him with a considerable amount of emphasis, because, as he averred, Sandy was not doing properly the piece of work on which he was engaged.

"Vera lickly," replied Sandy, with much coolness, "for it's the exact wye that ye bade me."

"None o' yer inpident chat here, sir, or I'll gar yer chafts cry knyp owre that ill-hung tongue o' yours," said the master.

"Ye'll maybe better jist try't than," was Sandy's answer, indicating, not altogether obscurely, that in him too the bellicose element existed in a latent state.

"Scoon'rel ! D'ye think that ony maister 'll stan' that ? Gae aboot yer bizness this moment, sir ! Bonny story that I sud nae only hae things connacht, but hae your ill win' to pit up wi' forbye."

So Sandy's master had ordered him about his business, and Sandy went without further demur. But experience had made him wary in such matters. And thus feeling himself to be clearly in the right for once, he took the precaution of offering renewal of his services in presence of witnesses. This being bluntly refused, Sandy had recourse to his legal remedy.

"Ou jist lat ye 'im get a turn afore Shirra Watson again," was the advice of an experienced acquaintance, whom Sandy saw fit to consult in the business. "He's as weel kent there as he's respeckit to the ootwith ; an' at ony rate the Shirra's aye a gweed freen to the ser-van'. Ye sud get a haud o'yon muckle, lang-leggit chiel' 'at was awgent for me ance—fat d'ye ca' 'im ? He was some daar to pay, but, man, he has an awfu' tongue ; an' he *did* rive them up the richt gate. Gin ye dee that there's nae fear o' ye winnin' this time. No, no ; I wud hae naething adee wi' that young chap-pies hardly oot o' the shall ; they hae little rumgump-tion a hantle o' them, forbye 't they're fear't to speak oot. An' fat's the eese o' a lawyyer gin he hinna a gweed moufu' o' ill jaw !"

Accordingly Sandy Mutch, little to the comfort of the old souter, entered proceedings and summoned the man of no particular character into court ; and with the best results. The excellent Sheriff took a favourable view of the case ; and Sandy had the high satisfaction of being awarded his full wages and modified board wages, making together the sum of twelve pounds sterling.

"Noo, loon," said the souter, so soon as he had re-

covered from his astonishment at Sandy's unexpected good fortune, "Noo, loon, ye'll gi'e yer mither a note, an' pit the lave o' that siller in'o the Savin' Bank, to be gyang water to ye at anither time."

"Aw can dee better nor that wi' 't, ony wye," replied Sandy, in a tone indicative of entire confidence in his own capacity as an economist.

"Better wi' 't!" echoed the souter, under some excitement; "aw wud like to ken fat wye ye can dee better wi' 't?"

"There wud be some eese o' 't lyin' i' the bank wi' nae owreturn, an' only a triffle onwal at the year's en'."

The souter stared this time; and Sandy proceeded:—

"Aw'm gyaun doon to the market the morn to see foo girsin' beasts 's sellin'; they'll be an upwith market shortly, or it chates me."

The impulses of genius defy human forecast. Sandy Mutch's conduct had presented but a troublesome problem to his father hitherto; it had now attained the character of incomprehensibility. What could he think, or what could he say, about a son who was not merely impervious to his father's powers of reasoning, but had all at once spoken out with the air of a man entitled to talk down to the limited understanding of his benighted parent.

That evening, as the souter thought calmly over it, he could not avoid the reflection, that, provokingly stupid and disappointing as had been the conduct of his son previously, here, surely, was the climax of his self-willed folly in refusing to act on the barest rules of prudence even, in regard to the money so unexpectedly in his possession—rare commodity as it was in his experience. And his wife, who had been disappointed at not getting the "note" spoken of by her husband, was not on this occasion inclined to dissent from his opinion. But Sandy was perfectly firm, and only became the more taciturn the more that fresh attempts were made to re-open the subject. In short he would have, and he took, his own way.

Sandy Mutch's first purchase, and with which he returned from the market of which he had spoken, was a biggish "farrow" cow, speckled, with prominent haunch bones and rugged horns, and not in "high condition," as the dealers say. Sandy made the knowing people guess at the price; which they did, and hit above the mark considerably; and when Sandy told them that the actual price was "a croon oot o' sax poun'," they agreed that the farrow cow was a great "rug;" and as the purchase of the cow was directly followed by an equally judicious investment in a "stirk," the public opinion regarding Sandy Mutch got perplexed. Then when Sandy at first opportunity sold the animals at several shillings of profit each, the public opinion got more perplexed still. And thus did matters go on week by week.

"Nyod that loon o' the souter's 'll bleck Willie Futtrit, the couper, 'insel', gin he haud on the gate that he's deein'," said an admiring acquaintance in view of certain of Sandy Mutch's business transactions. "They tell me 't he turn't a stirkie 't he bocht a fyou ouks syne heels-o'er-heid i' the last market."

But turning animals heels-o'er-head, technically, by doubling the purchase price, was not always easy, however sincere a man's intentions in that direction might be. And so it was that Sandy Mutch's transactions at times threatened to go somewhat stiffly in the opposite direction. He had gone to An'ersmas Fair, and in his eagerness to do business walked out the Glentons Road to meet sellers bringing their cattle to the fair. They were a primitive set the dwellers in the Glentons; far off any public highway, little disturbed by communication with the outer world; and thus left to grow up as "great nature," in the shape of rugged hills and brattling burns, fashioned them. Sandy Mutch had not walked far when he met a Glentons crofter, with his broad blue bonnet, his coat of hodden grey, furnished with metal buttons the size of

a George III. penny piece, and his knee breeches, and ribbed stockings. The crofter led a little half Highland-looking cow, in a hair-plaited halter ; and his unsophisticated white haired boy, who had never hitherto witnessed such a stirring scene as that presented by An'ersmas Fair, went behind, carrying his father's hazel stick, to drive. The crofter asked four pounds for his cow ; and Sandy Mutch offered three. The crofter declined, and they moved on toward the fair. A quarter of a mile had pretty well exhausted Sandy's vocabulary of depreciatory adjectives as applicable to the cow, and it had also advanced his offer by five shillings. The crofter wavered, but slightly. He still stuck to his price, and merely spoke of "a gweed luckpenny" as the only deduction he would make. They had got to the place where the market "customer" stood collecting the twopences exigible for every cow, quey, or steer that passed ; and they stopped till the coppers should be paid, and a red keil mark put on the cow's hind quarters, in token thereof. A rapid summary of the cow's deficiencies, uttered with some vehemence, followed by a final offer of "three-pun-ten," ultimately overcame the Glentons man, and a bargain was struck in the very "mou' o' the market."

Sandy Mutch's object, as indeed his ardent and confident hope had been, to re-sell the Glentons man's cow forthwith, and realise at least ten shillings off the transaction. But, to his intense disappointment, no one seemed disposed to look at the cow with the purpose of buying her. The day was wearing on, and so far from this hope being realised, he had not yet been offered his own price. The farmers did not wish to have a Highland cow, and the coupers who passed sneered at it as a "nochtie beastie."

"Nyod, Sawney, ye're brunt for ance wi' that carlie, ony wye : the beastie's nae richt, min," said Willie Futtrit, handling the cow, and making the Glentons man's boy, who was now in sole charge during his father's temporary absence, lead it out a short space.

"He upheeld it, at ony rate," answered Sandy.

"Uphaud, or no uphaid, she's as hidc-bun's an aul' wecht, min. Fat time did she grow better o' the stiffness, laddie?" asked Mr. Futtrit, addressing the boy.

"She wasna never oonweel," was the boy's perplexed reply.

"Dinna ye tell me, noo. Ye've leern't yer lesson brawly, aw daursay; but ye'll better jist tell the trowth about 'er."

The boy persisted in an indignant denial of the old couper's suggestion; but Sandy Mutch felt himself touched on the point of honour. Here was an animal dexterously bought from one of the most unsophisticated-looking of men, and which yet, in open market, would not fetch its own price. Sandy was stung by the remarks of the senior coupers, and he determined to get out of his false position. If he had known the business a little better, he would have taken care to swallow his chagrin, and simply knock the best luck-penny he could out of the seller. He did not do that, but returning to the Glentons man, he roundly and hotly accused him of selling him, as a sound cow, an animal which was a confirmed "piner," and all but worthless. The Glentons man stoutly denied the accusation, which was loudly re-asserted amid a thickening group of sympathising onlookers.

"The beast's as soun's ever a beast was; and there's nae a handier creatur i' the market—I'll tak' my aith upon 't," said the owner of the cow.

"Maksna," retorted Sandy Mutch, "ye'll keep 'er for me. I'll hae naething adee wi' 'er;" and he made to move off, as he spoke.

"Get the joodge o' the market—get the joodge o' the market," cried the onlookers, who by this time had got keenly interested in the squabble. "He canna be alloo't to brak' the man's market that gate."

One or two of the crowd bustled off to fetch the judge of the market, who was soon found in the person

of Tammas Rorison, the banker and "bailie" of the Burgh, who happened also to be agent for the owner of the market stance, and custodier of the "market customs" at An'ersmas Fair. The banker was a man of middle height, but greatly more than medium rotundity, whose strongly marked face was encumbered with little in the way of beard, beyond a pair of strictly defued whiskers in the middle of his cheeks, although his head was crowned by a dense crop of stiffish hair, inclining to red in colour, but now sprinkled with grey. A stout tuft of this hair was always brushed up right in front, and when the banker stood erect, put his legs together, and hooked his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat, which was his favourite attitude, he bore a curious resemblance to an enormously overgrown seal set upon its tail.

"Fat's adoo—fat's adoo?" asked the banker; "ony chiel' fechtin', or fou?"

It was explained that a trading dispute only had occurred.

"Ou ay, some coupin' transaction. Fesh them this gate, oot o' the thrang a wee bit, an' we'll seen saddle that."

Tammas Rorison, the judge of An'ersmas Fair, was a man whose power in his own domain was as potently exercised as that of many rulers; and on being summoned before him, Sandy Mutch not only felt impelled to obey without demur, but also that his capability of defence was at the same time sensibly diminished. The judge straightened himself up in his usual attitude, and heard the story of the seller of the cow. He then called for Sandy Mutch's statement.

"Weel," said the judge, "I wudna won'er nor ye've promis't something owre an' abeen fat the beastie's worth; but that's nae rizzon for brakin' yer bargain, man. Fat?—a fau'ty beast is't? We canna tak' your word for that, ye ken. The beast's there as ye see't. Fat proof hae ye o't bein' a piner?—Willie Futtrit!

Weel, peer man, I daursay Willie's word wud be jist as gweed's his aith aboot buyin' or sellin' a coo ; an' like aueuch he wud swear black an' blue till obleege a neebour, though he never saw the coo in's life afore. But I think we'll aiven be deein' wantin' 'im this turn. Come ye awa' an' pay the man for's beastie ; an' see an' mak' yer best o't. Fowk's nane the waur o' some bocht wit files."

There was no appeal from the judge of the market ; and the Glentons man got his money accordingly ; the only bit of threatened revenge, when the man asked at what time he would take possession of his purchase, being the declaration from Sandy Mutch that he "wud gar 'im stan' there wi't till sin-doon," as "a' law" allowed him to do ; a threat which he did not fully carry out, for the simple reason that it would have been inflicting punishment on himself equally with his opponent.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COUPER FULL FLEDGED.

THE transactions recorded, though all very well for a beginning, and giving good promise of greater things to come, could not long satisfy the ambition of a man who had the true cattle-couping spirit within him.

Besides certain annual fairs, there were within a radius of eight or nine miles several markets that occurred at much shorter intervals. At each and all of these Sandy Mutch was a regular attendant. Occasionally he bought an animal or two, and sold them again before he left the market; occasionally, too, he made a plunge and bought several. In this latter case he at once threw himself abroad for buyers in a seemingly cursory, yet not unknowing, way.

"Weel, I mith brak' the lottie to obleege an acquaintance, though I canna sell the lave sae weel—will ye gi'e's a bode?"

If the man gave a "bode" for one or two "stirks," Sandy would loudly declare that he had offered less for what formed really "the pick" of the lot than the average "owreheid" price to himself. How far the statement might square with the facts, he would know best himself, but in any case when he got in tow with a buyer or buyers, he knew that he was in a fair way to sell out again, or bring his stock to such reduced dimensions by the end of the market as would enable him to clear scores by receiving cash with one hand, and paying it over with the other.

Occasionally, too, it happened that he neither bought

nor sold. His object was profit, and unless he encountered a man with whom he imagined he could drive a bargain somewhat under the market price, that object could not be served. He was not always successful, even to the extent of holding his own, for it would happen now and again that another couper, or other tricky person would contrive to land a faulty beast upon him, of which he could get quit only by making a loss; and at times the balance of wits was so even between buyer and seller that he found himself in the position of being obliged to re-sell even a "fau't-free" beast at exactly the same price as he had paid for it, and that perhaps after undergoing the trouble of taking it home from one market and out to another, not to speak of its board meanwhile. But in any case it was business, bargain-making, and among the set to whom Sandy was now getting fully assimilated there was a strong belief in the simple "owre-turn o' siller" as a commercially wholesome proceeding apart from questions of productiveness or profit.

They were not a particularly reputable set those coupers. Mostly bleared, dilapidated-looking elderly characters; generally, not invariably, of the male sex; fond of tobacco and snuff, and fonder of whisky. Their wits were sharp enough, and their language was not choice, though it was a general belief that amongst them downright "leein'" and systematic deception were not practised on such an elaborate and complicated scale quite as among their contemporaries who dealt in old and half-worn horses.

In the earlier part of his career, both rapid manipulation and an occasional "hitch" from a brother couper were needed to enable Sandy Mutch to meet his engagements in making payments. But a strong report once and again sent abroad of large profits secured by certain transactions by and bye gave distinct form and body to the impression that Sandy was a prosperous trader; and his credit rose in a wonderful way. No-

body now doubted his verbal promise to pay, hardly even the bank as represented by its local agent, Mr. Tammas Rorison. He had now begun to purchase larger cattle from the farmers, and happy indeed was the seller who could secure his best "bode" when he was really of a mind to buy; for it was known that Sandy Mutch would not "haggle" over a few shillings, inasmuch as if he bought at a full price he would sell to equally good purpose, and despatch of business was of consequence to a man like him. In summer he rented a field or two of pasture grass; in winter he purchased a number of acres of turnips for the sustenance of stock. And as locomotion a-foot did not adequately serve the exigencies of his increasing business, he got a horse and gig for personal use. His "machine," as Sandy termed the gig, became familiarly known, not only at the markets, but at many a substantial farmstead, where Sandy Mutch was an occasional caller in quest of stock to buy, and where he was ever a welcome guest, received on a footing, if not of perfect equality, certainly of entire familiarity, and his judgment deferred to in matters of bovine economy.

That this rapid and steady rise in his fortunes should beget a little envy in the minds of some of the less generous of Sandy Mutch's contemporaries, and the less successful amongst his rivals, was, of course, natural. There were those who even asserted that certain of his transactions were no cleaner than they ought to be; that in addition to over-reaching simple people without remorse when he got the opportunity, he had not scrupled to resort systematically to any of the underhand devices known to the lowest of his class that would serve his end for the time. These people also spoke of Sandy as "a peer ignorant slype," who "mith ken about a nowte beast weel aneuch b' guess o' ee; but for ony kin' o' buik lear cudna tell ye a B fae a bull's fit," and as being at best but the daily companion of a set of very questionable characters.

Like many of the candid things that our friends say about us, if the spirit of these utterances was somewhat harsh, their substance was not perhaps far from the truth. But then what need for "book lear," if a man felt no sense of loss, and suffered nothing in pocket or general credit by its absence? And it was just this special power of measuring and estimating cattle by "guess o' ee," that constituted Sandy Mutch's distinguishing faculty in a business point of view, and enabled him to get on. It would have puzzled him hopelessly to be asked to calculate the value of a carcase of beef—the number of pounds weight and the price per pound being given as the two factors; yet with the live animal before him, Sandy would, by a sort of intuitive mental process, fix its "dead weight," as it stood, with surprising exactitude, and attach the value accordingly as regulated by "ripeness" of flesh, current price, and so on. It was by the assiduous exercise of this inborn faculty that he had made his rising reputation.

Sandy Mutch's mother was amply satisfied with her son. Sandy was to her now simply a man of large business and ample means, through whose relationship to her she was entitled to a sort of reflected glory. And, to do him justice, Sandy had of late shown a certain readiness to recompense maternal attention to his needs, by now and again handing over to his mother a proportion of the loose silver and copper coinage that occasionally accumulated in his trouser pockets. His home was still chiefly under the paternal roof, though in marketing and otherwise he was much absent; and if this made his domestic habits less regular than might have been desirable, there was a great deal to be allowed for in the case of a person of such importance in the community. To the old souter, the matter wore a less gratifying aspect. His desire would still have been to see his son addict himself to some form of honest industry whatever it might be, and he was far from certain that "couping" cattle was to be strictly so defined.

“ He ’ll coup till he coup owre the tail i’ the gutter some day ; an’ that ’ll be seen yet,” said the souter.

“ Man, wud naething satisfee ye,” said the souter’s wife, in reply—“ Aw ’m seer he ’s a muckle ta’en oot man by’se fat he wud ’a ever been sittin’ wi’ the lap-stane on ’s knee. Fat has a’ your nain hard wark, an’ a’ yer heid o’ lear deen for ’s ? Little mair nor get the bare bit an’ the dud, an’ keep a sober aneuch reef abeen oor heids. Fat for wadna the laddie try something that fowk can mak a livin’ at ?”

The souter was, as usual, talked down but not convinced, and he merely added—“ Be the mailin gryte or sma’, fowk sud win their livin’ b’ the honest eese o’ their han’s, fan they hinna ta’en patience to be quali-feet for deein’ ’t wi’ their harns. It ’ll come to nae gweed wi’ ’im ere a’ be deen.”

It might be ; only the potential facts were against the souter, meanwhile at least ; for was it not the case that by common consent Sandy was doing a thriving business, and bidding more than fairly to be one of the prosperous men of the place : that he had already virtually risen out of the rank of the mere coo-couper, and gained a sort of indirect recognition even from men of the status of Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., the great grazier and dealer, who had oftener than once effected a purchase of “ stores ” through the medium of Sandy as a sort of agent.

CHAPTER V.

AN INCIDENTAL OCCURRENCE AND THE SUBSEQUENT ORDEAL.

IT has been already told how Sandy Mutch had attained, and decisively made the fact known that he had attained, belief in himself. A very important element, without doubt, in many kinds of success. But some men who possess abundant and unquestioning belief in themselves fail utterly in securing a corresponding belief on the part of their fellow-men, or, indeed, in gaining their confidence in even a moderate degree. Not seldom, however, the two go together; and the man who has unwavering faith in himself obtains the adhesive belief of his fellows on what seem wonderfully easy terms. It is not for me to say that it was so with Sandy Mutch. True, he had been an admitted dunce in his earlier years, and thereafter, even, seemed in some danger of turning out to be a man whose place in creation had not been discovered. But latterly—well, we need not repeat. Whatever envious or ill-natured people might say, Sandy had reached a position which nobody, whose good opinion he cared for, doubted or despised. He had abundant elbow-room to all appearance, and the proverb which speaks of “makin’ a speen or spoilin’ a horn,” embodied the advice he had begun to give to less experienced men than himself.

But, in such a career as his, there could not fail to come in little incidents not of a strictly business character, which yet had their interest as illustrations of human life, and one of these may be here briefly narrated.

On a certain market day, in the early afternoon, when business was not much past its height, and men and cattle still clustered thickly together on the Green, the crowd near by Rob Findlater's tent was startled by several loud shouts from the interior of the tent, followed by a crashing of glasses, the screams of Rob's female assistants, and the visible appearance of two or three figures once and again dabbing against the interior of the canvas walls. And presently Rob rushed out bareheaded and in his shirt sleeves, as his style was on market days. Pushing through the knot of people that had crowded toward the entrance to peep in, Rob, in a state of wild excitement and wrath, shouted loudly for "the poleece!"

It so happened that both the district sergeant and a plain constable of that efficient civil force were near by, who at once obeyed Rob's call for their services, and directly made their way into the interior of the tent. What precisely had happened it was not easy for those outside on the Green to discover. In a little, comparative order and quiet had evidently been restored within the tent, and the constable was placed sentry at the door to keep off intruders. But clearly something serious had been done or threatened, for Rob Findlater was too familiar with the ordinary course of mere surface ebullitions to seek the aid of the police without due cause. Some said a man had been "fell't" by another man; some said he was "stickit;" and some that his skull had merely suffered a sensible "clour." Whatever it might be, it seemed fortunate that "medical aid," in the shape of the village doctor, was quite at hand; and the next step was to call in his professional services. By and by the victim was declared to be Willie Futtrit, the well-known veteran coo-couper, whose brother, Francie Futtrit, was farmer of Dykeside. His injuries through blows received were understood to be—considerable damage to the present visual powers of an eye, the loss of a few teeth, and a scratch more or

less about the nose sufficient to make that organ bleed rather freely. The part that caused the most profound excitement was the statement that these blows had been administered by Sandy Mutch. Evidently more would not be easily learnt just then, for after the interruption that had occurred, Rob Findlater had got crusty and taciturn ; and, with the approval of the police sergeant, and the concurrence of certain persons inside the tent, who had been " ta'en witnesses," he by and by abruptly announced that business was suspended, and the tent closed for the time in so far as the general public were concerned.

It were needless here to repeat the fifty-and-one different forms in which the occurrence in Rob Findlater's tent found circulation during the succeeding nine days. Its origin was stated to have been certain gratuitous allegations made by Willie Futtrit with a view to depreciate the character of a lot of cattle sold by Sandy Mutch to an amateur farmer immediately before ; the implication, of course, being that as the man was a greenhorn, advantage had been taken of the fact to cheat him in a degree at which even the honour that prevails among coupers might legitimately revolt. It became understood that Willie Futtrit gave good promise of reasonably speedy recovery ; indeed, there were not wanting those who from the outset were inclined, rather uncharitably perhaps, to scout the idea that anything really very serious could have happened to that gentleman ; and, in confirmation of their view, they offered such remarks as that " Willie's been in owre mony sharries for that," and that " there's a heap o' killin' in a caird." At any rate, it was understood that Willie was in a fair way, all things considered ; and it being the case that in his normal state he was not an exact counterpart of Adonis in figure or face—plainly, he was an ugly, snuffy little man—there seemed reason to believe that the permanent disfigurement resulting from the injuries inflicted upon him would

hardly amount to an appreciable deterioration. Moreover, as it was sufficiently well known that he had "a curs't ill tongue, the creatur," it was admitted to be, after all, matter of doubt whether Willie Futtrit had got much more than he had fairly merited.

One cause of general regret, when the matter could be looked at in cool blood, was that Tammas Rorison had not been in the way to give judgment on it off-hand. In former days, Tammas had been known to administer prompt and impartial justice in such squabbles by fining both parties, and advising them to "haud wi' less drink neist time." Only the policeman was less omnipresent then, and the matter was now into the hands of the police authorities, so that there was no help for it but await the issue in the Sheriff Court. A formidable case it might be for the "summary" roll, but luckily for Sandy Mutch it was got so adjusted, and bail accepted.

By the day fixed for hearing the case, Sandy had taken care to retain the shrewd lawyer who on a former occasion had served him so well. The charge was one of "assault to the effusion of blood and serious injury of the person;" and when Sandy Mutch had taken his place in the dock, and by the instructions of his lawyer pleaded "Not Guilty," the public prosecutor announced—"Call William Futtrit." In due course, the bar officer ushered Willie into court. By a certain amount of persuasion, amounting to something like objurgation, he was induced to enter the witness box, where he exhibited a strong tendency to be seated. That position being inadmissible in the circumstances, he was next, with some difficulty, prevailed upon to turn his face toward the Sheriff, and away from the dog-Latin inscription on the gallery front, which told people to respect the landmarks which their forefathers had set up. When he had got so far as to hold up his hand and take the oath with a kind of passable approach to "due form," he leant forward on the slight apology

for a desk in front of him, ready to proceed. From the story given by the witness in his "examination-in-chief," it appeared that on the day of the alleged assault Willie Futtrit, meeting Sandy Mutch in Rob Findlater's tent, had, in the most friendly spirit possible, sat down near by him for the purpose of having a little conversation relating to their common business; that, in course of this conversation, Mutch had got very unaccountably angry, and extremely abusive, even for him; and that on witness starting to his feet for his own safety, Mutch had got the whip hand of him, by gaining a perpendicular posture first, and forthwith administering a series of blows; could not say how many; "it cam' like the shot o' a gun;" the result, after a brief tussle, during which witness endeavoured "to keep aff o' 'imsel," being to leave him prostrate below one of the tent seats, with serious damage to his person, as per inventory of wounds. "No; we had no dripk thegither; cudna say if Mutch had drink upon him; have seen him waur."

The cross-examination was by no means such smooth sailing. The first question put by Sandy Mutch's agent was—

"Did you, on entering Findlater's tent that day, go and thrust yourself unbidden into Mutch's company?"

Willie Futtrit had his wits quite sufficiently about him to appreciate the desirability of shirking an affirmative reply, and he said—

"It'll be lang to the day that I'll seek to force my company on ony man."

"I'm not concerned with what you may do in the future, which is no doubt problematical. Will you answer my question—Did you, of your own accord, and without the least invitation, thrust yourself into the company of Mutch and his friends?"

"I did naething o' the sort; ony ane kens that there's nae preevacy in a tent; fowk maun gyang faur they can win."

“Then, you mean to say that there was no room for you elsewhere in the tent?”

“I’m nae sayin’ naething about it. Keerious thing gin a man wudna get leave to choise his nain seat in a place ’t’s as free to the common caird wi’ a saxpence in’s pouch as it is to the laird o’ the lan’.”

“Even though it should be at the cost of intruding yourself where you are not wanted? Well, you have told us of this conversation that you persisted in having with Mutch.—Were you disappointed when he and his friends did not offer you any drink?”

“I can pay for drink for mysel’ fan I wunt it. I socht none o’ their drink,” answered Willie indignantly.

“Oh, of course not. Only you let it be known that it would have been a handsomer thing had they given you a share of what was going,—Eh?”

“Gin people dinna k-now fat it is to be genteel there’s little eese in tellin’ them.”

“And it was after you felt that you had been ungentlely treated that you began to blow up Mutch; and to tell everybody in the tent, who chose to listen, that he had just cheated an ignorant man, in selling him four cattle?”

“No I didna.”

“Tell us what happened then.”

“They gaed on wi’ their newse.”

“Yes, but what of this lot of cattle; when the conversation about them began?”

“I min’ naething about it.”

“Did you say that they were sold for more than they were worth; and that the buyer had been ‘brunt to the black back’?”

“I didna say that ony wye.”

“Recollect what you did say then, and be kind enough to tell us.”

“I tell ye I min’ naething about it—nae won’er wi’ a heid daumer’t’s mine’s been; an’ ye needna seek to gar me tell lees.”

"N-o," replied the agent, nodding his head and speaking very deliberately, "N-o ; I should think that, in your case, very unnecessary. We are only trying to extract a little of the truth—Did you describe the lot of cattle, which had been represented to the buyer as of best quality, as 'three hide-bun' wallydraggles, an' the foort ane a —— eeseless buffalo brute'?"

"Aw mith 'a mention't a buffalo ; but I dinna bann."

Hereat there was laughter in the Court, which the judge, who seemed to take the matter with an air of amused easiness, appeared nowise unwilling to enjoy. He wanted to know what the term "buffalo" signified in this connection ; and why it should be a term of opprobrium. To this the examining counsel replied that his lordship had better take the information from some of the skilled witnesses rather than from him, though he could assure him of his own knowledge that it was a most grave charge for any man to bring against another that of selling a buffalo under pretence that it was an ordinary bullock ; a charge such as Futtrit well knew was fitted seriously to injure the character of a person like Mutch. Here the judge made a half aside observation, which to those near him sounded very like something about "No much character to spill between the twae ;" and the counsel, who had evidently caught the remark, whatever it was, replied in the like spirit, "Well—I should not wish to build my case on that feature, my lord!"—"Did you, when you lay down in the tent floor, kick right and left with your feet, and seize Mr. Mutch's hand in your teeth?"

"I was ca'd owre like a fell't nowte. I didna lie doon nor kick nae ane."

"You did not kick,—you only bit his thumb.—Well?"

"Aw never gat a haud o't to bite yet,"

"Then you only tried and didn't succeed : your inability and not your will standing in the way."

"You may go," said the good-natured judge ; and Willie Futtrit then left the witness perch.

Then the examination proceeded. Rob Findlater was called and one of his assistants ; as were also a few persons from the general body of occupants of the tent ; with a couple of farmers in whose company Sandy Mutch had been when the fray with Willie Futtrit occurred, and whose testimony was given for the defence. The doctor, who had been at the trouble to write out a formal report, gave his evidence at length, in good set terms, and with great precision. The report bristled with technical phrases about "the dental" and "nasal regions," "abrasion of the cuticle," and so forth : the sum of *Æsculapius's* testimony being, in plain English, a broken nose, and two teeth knocked out. The united evidence of the eye-witnesses did not give a particularly lucid view of the facts in their connection ; though, on the whole, under the skilful examination and cross-examination of the counsel for defence, it was cumulative against Willie Futtrit, in so far that he certainly had somehow adjoined himself to Sandy Mutch, who evidently did not want him ; and that beyond this he had shouted out with sufficient loudness about the wallydraggles and the buffalo to compel everybody in the tent who was not stone deaf to hear him. On one point here there was a slight divergence of opinion. It was not as to whether Willie had or had not used the first adjective attributed to him in describing the buffalo, but as to whether he had used the last substantive or a still uglier one beginning with the same consonant ; one of the witnesses, who was incidentally questioned as to Willie's general abstinence from "banning," returning for answer the suggestive query, "Div ye think that ever the man wud 'a fun's wecht amo' sic a set gin he cudna bann wi' the best o' them ?"

Then came the speeches for the prosecution and the defence. The latter was prefaced by the reading of testimonials on behalf of Sandy Mutch. There was first a joint certificate written out by the largest farmer in Sandy's native parish, and signed by several others.

It set forth that they had known "the barer from his invincy," for so the worthy man had contrived to spell "infancy." No doubt they had had the will to say much good, and to say it strongly, but being deficient in superlatives, the subscribers merely set forth that Sandy Mutch was "a peaceable and obleegin' man, and industrious person." The other testimonial was from Patrick Ellison Scurr, Esq., and certified in a rather dry and matter-of-fact style that Sandy had been known to him for some time as a young man who gave good promise as a "cattle jobber." Sandy's agent made the most of this, as showing that, while there no doubt was a low class of persons trafficking in cheap and inferior cattle, and ready, as the evidence led that day proved, to force themselves in, with brazen impudence, where their presence was not desired, his client, on the very high testimony now submitted, belonged to a different and altogether much superior grade. And, on the whole, considering the outrageous nature of the insult offered to his client by a person whose character his Lordship would not require him to describe, he thought the sentence should be one of acquittal; or, at most, a purely nominal fine to remind the community that no private citizen could, even under the strongest provocation, wisely take the law into his own hands or administer correction, however well-merited.

The learned Sheriff had not thought it needful to harass himself in the way of taking notes of the evidence given; neither did he feel it needful to go into an elaborate deliverance now. He remarked that a very vulgar and somewhat violent assault had been proved, such as no person who wished to gain or retain a respectable character would have been guilty of. And looking at the youth and physical bulk of the accused as compared with the waning strength and limited stature of the person assaulted it should strike anybody as unmanly. Possibly the provocation had been considerable, but no provocation would justify such outrages; and the accused must pay a fine of two pounds.

The expectation among Sandy Mutch's acquaintances had been that a heavier sentence would probably be inflicted ; and thus, their congratulations on the result of the trial were very hearty. Their sympathies in the matter that led to it had been largely with him from the outset. In consequence, Sandy's character suffered nothing in their estimation. Naturally enough, Willie Futtrit was displeased. The fact that his lost teeth should not have been estimated at a higher rate than one pound each, let alone other loss and damage, was so bad as to be positively insulting. And when a fine was going at any rate Willie had the belief that it was simply iniquity, "framed by a law," that prevented him, as the chief sufferer, from obtaining the lion's share of the sum awarded. Therefore, when the proper official paid him with a miserable three shillings and sixpence, in name of expenses for attending the Court as a witness, and told him that any further remedy against Sandy Mutch must come in the form of a civil action, at his own charges, he returned home in a mood some way short of amiable.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COUPER DOWN.

THERE was only one circumstance connected with the court case over which Sandy Mutch grieved. "Time's money wi' me, ye see," was an observation which Sandy, in common with other men whose thoughts are toward a great future, had, about this period of his life, got into the habit of making; and surely it could not have happened more awkwardly, even had the public prosecutor and the Sheriff been filled with malevolence against him than that the court should have been fixed for a "St. Saar's day." But so it had been; and Sandy Mutch had been broken of one of the great days of the season, in a trading point of view; for St. Sair's came but once a year, and he had trusted to doing a large stroke of business on that day. Sandy complained of his disappointment much and loudly at the time, and for a long while after; for the dried-up state of the pastures, and the critical position of the turnip crop, had brought about a juncture of affairs by which feeble men were paralysed, and only the bold and perspicacious found themselves in their element. Two days later, and a copious rain had changed the conditions, and made buying or selling an easy matter for any man with a single pennyweight of brains in his skull. Of course, fortune was still before him for the winning, and Sandy Mutch was not the man, by any means, to give in the chase faintly; but lost ground at times is hard to regain. So argued the Couper.

And surely it were more than the conditions of this mortal life permit that even the most brilliant career

should not at one point or another suffer temporary eclipse. It is, in the very nature of things ; a phase of the inevitable ; which, however, like the passing cloud on the sun's disc, serves only to make more magnificent the undimmed power of the luminary, when it has emerged from the momentary shade. It was hardly to be anticipated that Sandy Mutch would be for ever exempt from the adverse contingencies of a trader's life accruing in one way or another. Neither was he ; for by and by rumours got abroad that Sandy, as a business man, had on a sudden found himself in deep water.

“ Ye dinna mean to say 't the couper's fail't ? ”

“ Ay, man, the couper's broken. ”

“ Keep's an' guide's, fa wud 'a thocht o' Sawney Mutch sittin' doon noo ! ”

“ Weel, min, he was gyaun a gryte len'th for a chiel' that begood wi' an aul' coo or twa less nor half-a-dizzen o' year syne ; as you an' me tee min' weel. ”

“ Ay, but loshtie, man, Sawney was thocht as gweed's the bank ony day wi' the fairmers. There's fyow wud bleck 'im amo' nowte beasts, buyin' or sellin', lat aleen a fair swap ; an' he's hed a gryte owreturn o' siller. ”

“ Owre muckle, aw doot. He hed been sen'in' them to Lunnon b' the dizzen ilka ither ouk, hale-wheel, this file, lippenin' to the tae lift to releive the tither ; an' syne wi' the fou han' in a backgaen market, Sawney begood to fin' oot that he hed won to the en' o's tether. ”

“ Man, it'll mak' an' unco reerie i' the kwintra side. Fat'll they dee wi' 'im ? Will they jile 'im ? ”

“ Hoot-toot—jile 'im ! Nae fears o' that. They war tellin' me that it wud be sowder't up, mair nor lickly. Man, they canna weel affoord to lat 'im gae to the gowff. Mony a gweed raik o' siller has he paid for beasts ; an' ov coorse severals o' them wud lickly be cautioners, or hae len'it sooms till 'im. ”

"The bank keeps the like o' 'im up af'en."

"Ou, ay; an' the bank 'll ken fat for, come o' ither fowk 't like."

"Weel, I'm taul', at ony rate, that there 'll be fat they ca' a 'composition'—payin' them sae muckle i' the poun' aff o' han' like."

"To lat Sawney win to the road again, in coorse?"

"N—weel, aw cudna say about that; aw'm some dootfu' min. It's nae sae easy gettin' yersel' gaither't fan ance ye're flung 'o your braid back."

"There was a heap o' them liket to deal wi' 'im, though, raither nor the regular butchers, an' that—men 't they hed transackit wi' never so lang, an' 't hed aye the siller ready i' their han'. Ye see they aye thocht Sawney wud rin raither abeen the market price afore he wud wunt a lottie o' beasts."

"Jist like the fairmers; they dinna ken fan they get the vailue o' fat they're sellin'; an' 'll rin their risk o' dealin' wi' ony weirdless loup-the-cat for the sake o' a skinnin' mair nor fat a thing's really worth."

"Ay, man, they ken richt foo to grip at a' that they can get, though it sud be never so oonrizzonable or wheety like; an' neist time they 'll jist gae as far the tither gate drammin' thegither, haudin' the gill stoup upo' a'budy that comes within cry, an' near han' strivin' aboot fa 'll be latt'n' pay maist o' the drink."

These sentiments, uttered by a couple of interested contemporaries, indicate not inaccurately the position of affairs, and the tone of public feeling in relation to Sandy Mutch's pecuniary difficulties. In his time of growing prosperity Sandy had found no difficulty in obtaining liberal "accommodation" from Tammas Rorison the banker. While paper of his to a certain amount was kept floating by the use of sundry names of farmers amongst whom he transacted business, the banker could not in the case of such a valuable and desirable customer—who, if mismanaged or disobliged,

might have got into the hands of the rival banker—hesitate to grant, at his own risk, an occasional overdraft not covered by any outside security. And now that Sandy had suffered what he termed a “back-jar,” he was just a little confused as to the amount of either his liabilities or assets, book-keeping and accounting, in even their simplest forms, being arts to him utterly unknown. Naturally enough the banker, who had had opportunity of knowing his man sufficiently well on more sides of him than one, knew also much better than any one else how the liabilities stood, and by taking Sandy in hand personally, as a sort of an informal trustee, he next got at the assets with sufficient accuracy to enable him to declare, as he did without any long delay, that the composition must be six and eightpence in the pound. The creditors were asked to approve of this, and they approved in a general way accordingly. It was understood that the paper drawn in Sandy’s favour would all be made good at the bank, or several other failures must occur. An undesirable event this latter, and not an inevitable one if things were judiciously gone about. So the banker hinted, and the banker knew and could handle the material he had to deal with as well as any man. Some of the “accommodations” were just a little inconvenient of adjustment. There was Burnside, for example, who had given Sandy accommodation for twenty-five pounds, being the season’s rent of a grass field; and Sandy had obliged Burnie in a similar way with twenty-eight pounds to clear his twelvemonth’s old manure account. Deprived of Sandy’s name on both bills, Burnie felt he should be in rather a tight place with his Martinmas rent to meet, and a hard “scrape” to get that up; but then, by Sandy’s failure, the smaller bill, as the banker pointed out, could happily be reduced to seventeen pounds in place of twenty-five pounds, and by a determined push among men circumstanced like himself, Burnie, for correspond-

ing favours granted by him to them, got those obliging neighbours to take up a side of the two bills, and, like himself, hope on. True, the trifle of discount went against him; but otherwise Burnie did not feel himself worse than before. He was still a solvent man, he understood; and he pitied Mutch, "peer stock," who had "fa'in' i' the rive" so undeservedly.

Some folks there were, who, when matters were arranged, said the banker, though he had not sought to "rank" in the list of Sandy Mutch's creditors, had contrived to keep himself and the institution he represented pretty-well scatheless; but in conceding fresh "accommodations," as he had done in certain cases, it was held undeniable that the banker had acted a very friendly part to those agriculturists who were involved in the couper's failure. No doubt there were grumblers among the outside creditors. Two or three persons who had sold cattle to Sandy a week or two before he was known to be bankrupt, threatened to be unpleasant. They had got no payment previous to the stoppage, and now they had to accept six and eightpence per pound over the bank counter, in place of the full "notes," bating a "luckpenny" and the usual allowance of "bargain ale." These grumbled loudly, and seemed determined to cherish a feeling of ill-usage in the matter, despite the banker's sharp rebuke of their unreasonableness; yet was it felt by the general public that Sandy Mutch's "sittin' doon" had been attended with less disastrous effects than could have been anticipated, considering the extent and unexpectedness of the collapse; and that these good results were largely due to the banker's skill there was no room to doubt.

CHAPTER VII.

UP AGAIN.

To Sandy Mutch, personally, the event of his failure brought a certain measure of discouragement. Deprived of his gig, which he had honourably given up, with the animal that drew it, for behoof of his creditors, he was again reduced to mere pedestrian activity. Of course, he was quite destitute of cash; and Tammas Rorison, the banker, who was for the time being very shy on that topic, when his client endeavoured to approach it, simply urged, "Hae patience Sandy, man; an' keep yer een about ye. It wudna luik sair to be gyaun about wi' a fou pouch eenoo."

In the circumstances, Sandy Mutch found it beyond his compass just yet to do even a limited business in swine dealing, which had presented itself to his mind as a hopeful and more easily attainable field than that of trading in larger cattle. And so, for a time, he again loafed about his native hamlet, finding shelter under the paternal roof, and awakening wrathful, but as hitherto ineffectual criticisms on his habits by his father, the souter.

But Sandy must have in his hand somehow; and thus, in course of a few months, he was again to be seen bustling about in the cattle markets. The scope of his operations was different, but trafficking in cattle was still his care: and, at the close of the market, he was ordinarily to be seen collecting and taking the charge of "droving" to the "Toon," or elsewhere, the lot purchased by one of the men who did a considerable

business as a butcher and grazier. And not exclusively as a common drover, paid at the rate of half-a-crown a-day and his drink, when employed. By common consent, Sandy had a large measure of skill as a buyer of stock ; and it was not in reason that this his talent should be allowed to rust utterly. Sandy had been once and again trusted to do a stroke in buying in his master's behalf, when his master, for reasons sufficient to himself, wished to keep in the background, and not reveal his identity to the seller.

There was another line, too, open to the man of no capital and an equal amount of principle ; only it must be prosecuted as a conjunct business ; and in this wise :—Two of the fraternity, or better still, three, met at the opening of the fair, and, by common understanding, promptly fixed on a likely lot of grazing beasts in the hands of some small farmer—if a verdant person, so much the better. Couper No. 1 first “ priced,” and offered for the lot in a matter-of-course way. He would keep the “ exposer” in hand up to his station in the market, and then subject the beasts to a fresh handling, thumping them about freely with his stick, and candidly expatiating on their weak points, but winding up with, “ Still an’ on, aw’ll stan’ to my bode—the aiven notes an’ a gweed luckpenny back—but ye’ll need to mak’ up yer min’ about it. Nae man’ll mak’ siller oot o’ them ; only aw’m jist needin’ something o’ the kin’ mysel’ the day.”

He has offered twenty pounds, and the price asked for the stirks is twenty-five pounds. The exposer is half indignant and wholly disappointed at the couper's appreciation of his stirks ; but the couper does not put himself about for that ; and after badgering the man for half an hour or so he sums up—

“ Weel, here's my han' ; (he extends the palm accordingly), a twenty-pun note, an' I'll lea'e the luckpenny to yoursel'. It's mair nor the creaturs's worth to ony ane ; mere hunger't atomies, an' a back-gaen market tee.”

"I'll raither tak' them hame again," exclaims the irritated owner of the stirks.

"An' ye'll get it adee, man, an' tak less siller neist time—but please yersel'," retorts Couper No. 1, who now retreats, giving "the wink" to Couper No. 2; and Couper No. 2 has hold of the man accordingly before any other buyer can put in a word. Couper No. 2 bids him ask twenty pounds and he'll maybe make an offer.—"Ye seerly dinna ken fat wye the market's gyaun, min. Offer't twenty poun' already! Nae fear o' ye."

"The man's nae oot o' cry yet that offer't it," exclaims the seller.

"Weel man, there wus twa feels; an' the ane that refees't the siller was the biggest feel o' the twa," is the reply of Couper No. 2; "the man's kent that ye wusna wantin' to sell."

"He kent brawly't aw wud sell, gin I gat vailue for my beasts."

"Ye dinna ken fat yer speakin' aboot, min; lat's hear a price't fowk can bid ye something, an' nae waste my time an' lose yer market baith."

Couper No. 2 is less reputable-looking and more scurrilous of speech than Couper No. 1 even; and he keeps an uncommonly sharp look-out lest any *bona fide* dealer who would really buy the stirks at their full market value should indicate a disposition to hang on, waiting his chance. The least appearance of anything of the sort he violently resents as a dishonourable attempt to break his marketing. In due course Couper No. 2, who has persecuted the owner of the stirks for three-quarters of an hour, gives place to another of the same "kidney." It may be No. 3, or quite as likely No. 1 returned again, the essential point being to keep outsiders off until the owner of the stirks either capitulates or is seen to be hopelessly obstinate.

"Weel, laird, are ye gyaun to tak' siller yet?" asks Couper No. 1; and he adds an emphatic declaration

anent his own good-natured softness in ever again "latt'n' his een see" the laird after the treatment he had previously given him.

"Nae the siller that ye offer't, ony wye," replies the owner of the stirks, in an apparently decided tone.

But the couper knows what all this is worth, and what may be the result of a renewed assault, and he continues his attack. If the man is in circumstances that compel him to sell, he like enough begins by-and-bye to waver in his resolution, which the couper quickly perceives, and loses no time in trying to drive home his bargain by generously offering to "refer it to ony man that kens the vailue o' beasts i' the market, this minit." Only a prompt conclusion either way is, he hints, imperative.

The root principle of this mode of trading, of course, is simply to step dexterously in between the legitimate buyer and the seller; keep the latter closely in hand under a series of assaults, till, through dint of sheer chicanery, a bargain has been concluded, and then fall back on the regular trader, or other *bona fide* buyer, to re-purchase at market price, and by so doing put the first buyers, who, to a certainty, have not as many shillings in pocket as they have promised to pay in pounds, in funds to "clear their feet," and allow them to profit in proportion as they have been successful in getting their purchases at under value. Sandy Mutch at an earlier stage of his career had on his own account attempted a little of what might be termed sharp dealing. And he now participated in a few partnership transactions of the kind just described; but, to do him justice, he did not go heartily into the line. The amount of "plunder" was not always enough to be satisfactory; occasionally its division could not be effected with perfect pleasantness, when the drink had been allowed for; and, besides, it tended on the whole to obscure his credit among his friends rather than otherwise, inasmuch as Sandy was never able to point

to an individual achievement of a satisfactory sort that he could really say was his own ; while his purse remained about as lank as before, and he made no real headway in business. But where there is a sufficiently pronounced will, a distinct way is sure to show itself in due course. And thus it came about that an opportunity for independent trading turned up by-and-by.

That fell disease, pleuro-pneumonia, visited the region and committed serious ravages among neat stock, to the terror of the farmers and graziers, who had not then the benefit of paternal legislation in the shape of regulations concerning contagious disease amongst animals. In the circumstances a panic ensued. When the disease attacked their stocks they knew that probably three-fourths of them would die if prompt measures were not taken ; and naturally the ordinary run of dealers and butchers fought shy of purchasing diseased beasts, or those that presumably had been in dangerous proximity to them. It was here that Sandy Mutch's talent and spirit of enterprise availed him. He now went boldly into certain speculative cattle transactions, the exact nature and conditions of which he did not openly proclaim ; only he was understood to have embarked somewhat largely in the killing and dead meat business. He certainly forwarded quantities of dead meat to the market, and when his "returns" had come to hand, he paid those from whom he had bought at rates fixed by himself, and which they were bound thankfully to accept.

In course of time cattle disease had disappeared from the locality, but not so Sandy Mutch's resuscitated business. He was again as well in heart as ever, and his familiar form seldom absent from any of the district markets as they occurred. He now bought steadily and in increasing values, often at the close of a market paying down in ready cash to the amount of several hundred pounds.

"He's an exterordinary chiel', Sandy Mutch ; foo he

has wun to the road again ! They tell me he's better upon 't nor ever," said Bowbutts, who rather loved to gossip a little about his old herd at a time, viewing him as one of the remarkable men of the place.

"An' weel fell's 'im," replied his neighbour, Gowan-wall. "It was jist menseless the siller 't he made aff o' diseas't nowte, aw b'lieve."

"Is't possible, man ? Weel, fa wud 'a thoct that fan he was herdin' my beasts, noo ?"

"Weel, I'm nae biddin' ye believe me ; but there's aye some water faur the stirkie droons, ye ken ; an' there wus severals that I ken that he ca'd owre beasts till, an' flay't them an' tyeuk them awa' to the Toon o' the seelence o' the nicht in a cairt ; an' that didna luik owre weel."

"An' wud the carkidges raelly been ta'en to the market, no ?"

"Weel, I'm jist tellin' ye fat aw'm tellin' ye—I wudna wunt to jeedge nae man."

"At ony rate, he's winnin' in amon' a lot o' the muckle fairmers again."

"Ou ay ; fan a chiel' has the siller in's pouch he'll hae little diffeekwalty o' gettin' a hearin' an' be thoct a hantle o'. It's nae lang sin' some o' 's aul' cronies wud 'a hed muckle adee to ken 'im, an' he hedna been pointet oot to them."

"That's jist the wye o' the wardle, man ; but Sawney winna brak's nicht's rest aboot that, gin the bools be rowin' richt wi' 'im amo' the nowte."

"But fat d' ye think, man ?—they tell me that he's gyaun to tak' a fairm 'imsel', gin he hinna deen 't else."

"Gyaun to tak' a fairm ! Ye're seerly jokin' noo, Gowanies."

"Jokin' or no jokin', his bode was neist to the heichest for Mull o' Meadaple the tither-day."

"*Ex-ter-ordinar !*"

"Ay ; an' it chates me gin he binna gettin' 't, tee."

"Weel, that does cove the gowan fairly !—Sawney

Mutch takin' ane o' the best pairts i' the kwintrose. Man, there's nae a place like it for girsin' beasts roon an' roon; lat aleen corn an' the green crap."

"An' Sawney didna need's mither to tell'im that."

"An' he's raelly ta'en the Mull o' Meadaple. Na, that will be news to oor goodwife; she hed aye a kin' o' notion o' the loon, for as droll a breet's he was."

"Ye see fat it is to hae a freen' i' the coort, man. There was a perfeck merdle o' them aifter't; but Sawney hed gotten the banker to pit in a word for'im wi' the new factor bodie—he's ane o' that Aberdeen lawvyers, ye ken, an' jist kens as muckle about grun' s' my pipe stapple there."

"Ov coorse; but he'll ken the richt side o' a shillin' brawly, and fat wye to screw't oot o' fowk, rizzon or neen.—There's fyoo o' them fa's back at that."

"Aw b'lieve ye're aboot richt there, Bowies. 'Well,' says the factor, 'but Maister Mutch is not the highest.' Ov coorse they hed it adverttees't 'the highest offer may not be acceptit.' 'I un'erstan',' says the banker, 'but gif it's nae passin' a tenpun note, Maister Mutch wud lea'e 'imsel' in your han'.' I got this, ye ken, fae them't hed it fae some o' themsel's. So it's nae ca'd aboot clype."

"Lat ye the banker aleen. He kens as weel aboot takin' grun' as ony o' them. He's factor't a hantle 'imsel' in's time, as weel's a' ither thing."

"Ou ay; he's nae a blate ane, Tammas, we a' ken that."

"So Sawney's gettin' the Mull toon!"

"Weel, I'm taul' it's as gweed's sattl't. Ov coorse it was thocht that the factor mith'a try't gin the tither man wud draw up a bit aifter'im; but he hed behav't vera honourable to Sandy, it wud appear."

"Vera honourable, as ye say," observed Bowbutts, somewhat equivocally.

"Nyod, man, it's mervellous fat enfluence 'll dee, espeeshally i' the takin' o' grun'," added Gowanwall.

“ In fack, there’s nae gettin’ o’ a pairt worth hae’in’ hardly wuntin’ ’t, there’s sae mony seekin’ them, an’ sae mony quirks o’ ae kin’ or anither afore ye can be seer. Hooever, the couper ’ll be fairly at the gate wi’ the best o’ them fan he’s in’o Mull o’ Meadaple.”

CHAPTER VIII.

PLENISHING THE FARM.

THE reasons why Sandy Mutch should wish to have a lease of the farm of Mill of Meadaple, were too obvious to need lengthened explanation. As the advertisement announcing that it was to let set forth, it was in itself a "desirable possession" for any man with the capacity of the cultivator within him; and then to Sandy Mutch it presented more than average attractions as a basis of operations. Sandy had laboured to persuade his friend, Tammis Rorison, the banker, with whom he was now once more on terms of full confidence, that a main cause of the instability of his previous position lay in the fact that he had no proper local habitation; no sufficient centre of action that could meet and accommodate the outgoings and incomings of such a business as his. And if the banker was not fully persuaded, he at least listened to Sandy's statement; the banker, moreover, knew that at that moment Sandy had on deposit with him a very comfortable balance on the creditor side of his account. How then could he for a moment decline to recommend him as a candidate for the farm he sought? After due consideration the banker decided that he would do it forthwith; and the banker never did things without just and sufficient reasons.

It was not to be thought that the banker's recommendation would go for nothing. Some said Sandy Mutch had taken the farm "at a ransom," and some predicted that his taking it at all was merely the pre-

lude to another failure. Nevertheless, when the period of entry had come, there he was, with an ample stocking of cattle of all sorts, and the needed implements of cultivation accumulating in due abundance.

The farm-house of Mill of Meadaple, it should be known, was of modern construction; not the old-fashioned sort with a thatched roof and the minimum of window space, but a commodious, well-lighted two-storey house, with carefully enclosed and neatly laid out garden in front. Sandy's social estate was that of a bachelor, and his previous domestic surroundings, while living in most part at the humble cottage of his father and mother, had not been of an elaborate sort. In the circumstances, Sandy had thoughts of removing the old people to occupy part of his newly-acquired residence, provided the souter would agree to come, which was by no means certain: for the souter, who still maintained a sort of standing protest against his son's career, had even gone the length of denouncing the leasing of the farm as the act of a man fairly "left to 'imself" for no good end.

"No; ye'll do nothing o' the sort," said Tammas Rorison, to whom Sandy had mentioned the subject, on calling to arrange some money transactions connected with his entry to the farm. "They're owre aul' to tak reet again though ye hed them transplantit the morn. To tak yer fader awa' fae his birse't-en's an' 's lapstane, nae to speak o' 's cronies, owrehaulin Kirk an' State, wud be to kill his comfort, an' maybe add little to yours, for he wud never tak' to new haibits an' new company. Hae patience, man; the hoose'll be worth itsel' to you yet," continued Sandy's sagacious adviser.

"It's sic a muckle jamb," said Sandy, "an' mair nor the tae half o' 't'll hae to stan' teem."

"Nae fear o' that; ye maun get the principal rooms made habitable in a decent fashion, an' a fyou raelly gweed things intil 't—a sideboord, for example, for the best parlour."

"Hoot, a side-board! Is that the name 't the gentles gi'es till a mahogany claise press?"

"No, no; it's a dining-room article."

"Oh, but I've aye ta'en my bit maet i' the kitchie, I wud never hae nae eese for the like o' that," pleaded Sandy.

"Maybe," said the banker; and he added enigmatically "but some ither body will, come time; an' a hantle depen's on appearances in maitters o' that kin'. Hae you gotten a gweed hoosekeeper?"

"She's a vera cawpable servan'."

"Elderly person?"

"N-o; nae passin' foorty or thereabout."

"Well, that'll do. Let *her* keep the ither servan's weel at the staff en'; but tak ye gweed care yersel', Sandy, lat me tell ye, that ye gi'ena 'er owre muckle heid room aboot the place. D'ye un'erstan'?"

"Weel, but a hoosekeeper maun tak a gweed hantle o' chairge aboot a fairm."

"Ou ay, ou ay; but hoosekeepers o' forty are sometimes unco willin' to tak chairge o' raither mair nor it's canny to lippen to them, Sandy man;" and the banker looked straight at Sandy with a waggish air. "Hoover, ye maun luik oot for a hoosekeeper o' anither kin' on yer ain account by an' by."

"Aw dinna ken aboot that," said Sandy Mutch, with a half sheepish look and a decided shake of the head, "a bodie's as wise to keep their heid oot o' the mink as lang's they can."

"It depen's a'thegither upo' fat an' fa ye buckle wi', Sandy," replied his astute friend. "Dinna ye think that for a chiel' settin' oot as ye are, a sonsy fairmer's dother wi' a gweed tocher wud be weel worth gettin' a grip o' ? Eh?"

Sandy, who had not expected the point to be pressed so closely, and was consequently rather taken aback by the banker's query, stammered out a sort of affirmative reply. The banker was quite in earnest, however, and

he went on to point out to Sandy Mutch that "a wife wi' a tocher" was simply the natural adjunct of a young man in the position he had now attained; not to say the essential factor in a fully satisfactory solution within a reasonable time of the financial and general business problem now before him.

"Ye ken, afore ye pay your inveetors, an' ae thing wi' anither, ye 'll be workin' upo' paper again for maist pairt; an' if ye 're to keep on your transack amo' beasts it mith be that I could hardly stretch the tether far aneuch for you. Wudna a thoosan' poun' or so come in unco handy, man, sax or nine months aifter this?"

"Weel, aw 'm nae sayin' that it wudna—or aiven the half o' 't for that maitter."

"The half o' 't! Na, na. Ye ken fat wye yer accoont 'll stan' by the time that yer stockin' an' wark leems are paid for. Na, na; there's little eese o' fowk throwin' awa' their advantages; ye've that muckle to leern yet, Sandy, appearandly."

In short, Tammas Rorison had calculated on his *protégé* making a suitable match as a part of the general plan on which he had based his support of him; and he proceeded to give him very practical advice, even condescending on the names of two or three young ladies who he knew very well had the necessary pecuniary qualification; and they were otherwise extremely attractive; so said Tammas.

"Here's the maiden o' the Muirton, noo; a strappin' lass wi' a lady's eddication—can play the piano or sing fae the buik, an' mak' 'er menners wi' the best o' yer toon-bred misses—her fader canna turn 'er aff wi' less nor a gweed aucht or nine hunner at onyrate; fat gin she war to come your wye noo?"

What if she were to come his way! Plain, blunt Sandy Mutch, who could buy an ox with any body, and talk in phraseology entirely appropriate to the occasion, or drink the accompanying dram with a natural and becoming gusto, but whose literary accom-

plishments merely enabled him to sign an accommodation bill occasionally in a rude way, and whose social advantages hitherto had not been such as to permit him to feel perfectly comfortable in drawing-room society of the type that Tammas Rorison had referred to; Sandy was startled into positive uneasiness as he declared his fear that such fine ladies were not "the kin' for him." The banker merely laughed at him in his own jocosely confident way.

"Fat! fairmer o' Mill o' Meadaple, wi' a hoose that hisna its marrow for miles roon aboot; an' nae think 't ye may hae the pick an' wile o' the lasses i' the pairt. Oh, fie mañ!"

"But ye ken the like o' that uppish fowk wudna think me"——

"Tut, tut—ov coorse ye're un'erstood to be weel fit for the place; an' sae ye are," continued the banker, not heeding the interruption further. "An' lat ye that be weel kent, man; get yer hoose pitten in order an' hae some o' yer neebours in aboot come time; only ye mauna mak' yersel' owre cheap; an' for ony sake dinna speak to the women fowk—especially wives wi' dothers o' their han'—as gin ye thocht the best o' them sair worth huntin' aifter. Haud ye up yer heid man, an' dinna lat them forget that ye're Mill o' Meadaple. Fan ye come to the point ye winna hae to seek some o' them twice, I can tell ye; tak' ye my word for't, noo."

These were Tammas Rorison's matured sentiments, and, as Tammas's time was up for the present, Sandy Mutch left him in a somewhat mixed state of mind; his views, it is to be hoped, more or less advanced regarding one particular style of bargain making, but not altogether certain how far his own skill might carry him successfully when the thing came to be attempted in actual practice.

CHAPTER IX.

IT IS RESOLVED TO ENTERTAIN THE COUPER PUBLICLY.

THE Whitsunday term had come and gone, the "neep seed" was finished, the jolly well-conditioned farm horses had been turned out to the grass fields to enjoy the time in perfect idleness, night and day—such twilight night as there was, for midsummer was at hand—and a general pause in the activity of farm operations had ensued, when all at once it occurred to the public around Mill of Meadaple that it had become chargeable with something like a positive neglect of duty. No; it was not the mere occurrence of a change of tenant in the place that affected them, and stirred their compunctions. Changes of tenants occurred here and there every year; and when they did occur, it was, no doubt, right and proper for neighbours to bear a neighbourly part, by giving "a lift" at the "flittin'," or such like. But in the present case the matter assumed an aspect of wider importance. It was felt that Mr. Mutch, of Mill of Meadaple, was a man whose career had done some credit to the place of his birth, while his energy and enterprise had been a potent influence in the well-being of the surrounding community. It was right that Mr. Mutch's position and talents should be publicly recognised, in some becoming way; and they hastened to decide what the whole circumstances demanded of them to do.

It was at Rob Findlater's inn that the originators of the movement agreed to meet for consultation, and there they mustered over a dozen strong—Muirton,

Bowbutts, Gowanwall, Burnside, and the rest of them. They mustered in the public room, with its sanded floor, its two spittoons, and its deal table, and forms. Then they called for a "half-mutchkin" for the company in general, with three bottles of ale for those who had degenerate tastes, or whose natural thirst could not be appeased by whisky; and then they proceeded to business

"Weel, men," said Muirton—they had called him to the chair, though Muirton said he had never dreamt of filling that position, and had great diffidence in taking it—"Weel, men, fat wud ye propose? It's weel kent that Maister Mutch is nae a man to coort the public fawvour by blawin' s nain horn's we've seen some dee wi' a hantle less occasion; but considerin' the buzness that he's transackit noo for years, an' the owreturn o' money that he's hed, I've said all along that I did not think it richt that he sud be latt'n sit doon amon's as a neebour onbeen enterteen't or ta'en some notice o'. Fat say ye, Bowbutts?"

"Weel, I've kent 'im sin' he was a laddie, an' that's mair nor some o' ye can say, aw daursay. He was aye a keerious loon; but I can tell ye I did no think to see 'im fairmer o' Mull o' Meadaple a dizzen o' year syne. I think wi' you, Muirton, that he's been an eesefu' man i' the pairt, an' deserves to be ta'en notice o'."

"Fat wud ye propose?"

"Aw, weel, aw'll raither lat some ither ane gi'e s min' upo' that bit o' t," said Bowbutts, with becoming modesty; "Burnie mith maybe lat's hear 'im."

"I've nae gryte expairience o' naething o' the kin'," said Burnie. "But we ochtna to lat the thing be deen in a shabby menner, ony wye."

The members of the meeting were a little backward in making any definite proposal, though one or two hints were thrown out vaguely about a "supperscription" for a silver-mounted snuff mull, or something of that sort. To this proposal, which was faintly supported

at best, Francie Futtrit, of Dykeside, declared his decided hostility. In Francie's estimation the best way to acknowledge the merits of the man they sought to honour, and give expression to their sentiments of respect and esteem for him would be, when the proper season came round, to make him the beneficiary in a "love darg," in the shape of a ploughing match to be held at Mill of Meadaple; and at which each man should do his part by ploughing a "rig" of lea or stubble land. The idea of the love darg seemed to meet a fair measure of acceptance from the meeting and promised to lead to some discussion, when the chairman interposed—

"No, no, men; a ploughin' match wud be nae compliment till a man 't's been sae muckle afore the public; an' forbye, Maister Mutch has stren'th o' men an' beasts to be mair nor maister o' a' the wark upo' the fairm. That'll never dee. Ye maun mak up yer min's to enterteen 'im."

"Enterteen 'im!" exclaimed Dykeside; "fat gate!"

"Weel, it cudna be less nor a regular public denner," answered the chairman.

"Hoot-toot, a perfeck throwin' awa' o' siller," said Dykeside; "a perfeck throwin' awa' o' siller to nae purpose."

The chairman's proposal seemed to strike some others of the gentlemen as erring on the side of magnificence rather, but after a little discussion it commended itself to the general feeling of the meeting, and Rob Findlater was taken into council to inform them at what cost per head a public dinner could be provided. "Ye ken a'thing would requare to be full an' genteel," added the chairman, to let Rob know distinctly what was wanted. Rob pondered and calculated the thing mentally.

"A'thing—full—an'—genteel," said Rob, scratching his head meditatively. "Weel, it canna be done at less nor half-a-croon."

“An’ wud that cover a’?” asked several voices at once.

“Jist the denner, wi’ a dram or a drink o’ ale a’ roun’.”

“Lea’in’ ilka ane to pay for’s nain drink aifter that?”

“That’s the eeswal wye,” answered Rob Findlater.

The meeting thought over it. In so far as the dinner signified eating and drinking, though, no doubt, fresh enough appetites would be there, it was pretty much the case of a pennyworth of bread to an intolerable deal of whisky. And, seeing the half-crown did not include drink in unlimited supply to each guest, the price was thought rather stiff; but as Rob Findlater shook his head decisively at the proposal for a slight reduction somewhat strenuously insisted upon, they contented themselves by a renewed exhortation about fulness and gentility—all but Dykeside, who, beginning at the mere grumbling point, gradually worked himself up to the pitch of being angry, and even somewhat abusive.

“Half-a-croon for a denner! Weel, Rob, man, ye sud mak a braw penny aff o’ t at that rate. Fat? Tell ye faur I cud get a gweed denner for less; ’s gin Kirkie didna gie the vera best ilka market day for a shillin’, or auchteenpence wi’ a half-mutchkin o’ punch to three!”

“Foo af’en hae ye denner’t wi’ Kirkie?” retorted Rob, who knew that Dykeside never by any chance paid for dinner with Kirkie or any one else.

“It mak’sna to you foo af’en I’ve denner’t wi’ Kirkie. It’ll be lang to the day that I’ll pay half-a-croon to you for a diet o’ maet—half-a-week’s boord to ony man wi’ an ordinar stamack! Aw won’er to hear ony ane speak o’ sic an extortion.”

Here Rob Findlater proceeded to utter certain inuendoes about its being “lucky that some fowk cud get plenty o’ lang kail an’ peel-an’-aet-potawtoes,” when the chairman interposed a little sharply with an observation about the meanness of some people; which

Francie Futtrit did not seem in the least to apply personally. He went on to express his sense of the extravagance of the dinner scheme, repeated his thrust at Rob Findlater, declaring Rob's proposed charge to be a "perfekc intak'," and thereafter abruptly and unceremoniously left the meeting.

"He's awa an' lat 'im gae," said Burnie. "It's keerious fat sud gar fowk come here to try an' mak dispeace. An' he dinna think weel o' the denner, lat 'im bide at hame."

"An' fearna ye but he'll dee't, unless ye pay for 'im," said Bowbutts, and the company laughed at Bowbutts's wit.

"An' that's weel min'et," said Burnie, tugging the bell-rope, "Foo muckle is't, lassie?" he added drawing out his long purse as Rob Findlater's waiter appeared.

"Auchteenpence," said the waiter.

"Heely! heely!" was the instant exclamation of half-a-dozen voices, as half-a-dozen other long purses were simultaneously drawn out and untied in friendly competition for the privilege of paying a share of the "lawin." But Burnie insisted on his right to clear the whole score, merely remarking that Dykeside, who had copiously slaked his thirst at the outset, should be reminded that Rob Findlater did not supply drink gratis any more than food.

The next point was to settle who should be chairman at the dinner. By universal suffrage, Muirton was at once chosen to the office; but Muirton not only demurred, he emphatically protested against the proposal. It was not simply his lack of qualification for the office—that *might* be got over—but the very notion of overlooking Tammis Rorison, the banker, was too monstrous to be entertained, and Muirton would not entertain it. On reflection, the meeting admitted that there was force in Muirton's view. It had not occurred to them; but the banker was undoubtedly a most important figure in the community; he would be so well "up to"

the whole business of chairmanship, too ; and then there would be a feeling of fresh and pleasurable novelty to some of them in being brought in contact with him in a way so strongly human, and so essentially different from that to which they were accustomed in the banker's private room. It was unanimously agreed that the banker should be asked to be chairman ; and that point being amicably settled, Muirton, with the modest remark that, " Failin' a better, he mith tak' the boddom o' the table," allowed himself to be nominated croupier.

CHAPTER X.

THE COUPER IS PUBLICLY ENTERTAINED.

A VERY natural expectation on the reader's part would be that I should now go on to describe with what vividness I could the entertainment to Mr. Mutch of Mill of Meadaple; the style in which the dinner was served, and the eloquent speeches delivered thereat; the songs that were "interspersed," and the hilarity and harmony that prevailed.—All this, with the enthusiastic reception accorded to "the guest of the evening," and the vociferous "three times three and one cheer more" that capped the climax when the chairman called for a special bumper, and asked them to drain it "to the health of our respected friend and neighbour, in whose honour we are assembled here to-night." I might have endeavoured to do it, for have not I, too, witnessed it all; have not I warmed up at the lusty "Hip—hip—hooray!" and the equally lusty strains of "He's a right good fel—low!" and been touched with sympathetic emotion when "the guest of the evening" rose under "evident deep feeling," and "amid renewed applause," to acknowledge the "unmerited honour"? Have not I witnessed all this under the friendly shelter of Rob Findlater's canvas tent, transformed for the nonce into "a spacious and elegant marquee," if one might accept the terminology of the local newspapers? But, questions of artistic propriety apart, one does feel that without the actual fumes of the toddy, and the living presence of the glowing bucolic faces, it is but a poor picture that mere words

can present to those who have not been privileged to participate in the reality. To those who have been so privileged, the memory of the thing ought for ever thereafter to be sufficiently green.

Let me be excused then when I simply say that the dinner came off with abundant *éclat*. Rob Findlater outdid himself, even, as purveyor; and the company did full "justice" to Rob and his viands. And after all, they had Muirton in the chair. He was a pawky carle Tammas Rorison the banker. Whether he would be chairman, and why ultimately he did not fill that office, were never at any point clearly understood by the testimonialists. Excepting Muirton, who had no doubt an inkling beforehand of how the case would be, the company were perplexed, and even exhibited some tendency to depression of spirits; but the banker put them all in high feather by the appropriate jocularity of his letter of apology duly read from the chair. They had Bowbutts for croupier, and though that worthy agriculturist was perhaps a little deficient in points of etiquette belonging to his function, as the dinner proceeded his abundant and growing *bonhomie* formed a pleasing relief to the somewhat stately manner which the chairman felt it incumbent on him to maintain throughout. When the important part of the evening's business was over, and Sandy Mutch, in reply to the toast of his health, had delivered himself as he best could, of the sentiments that possessed his soul, they took up a formidable string of toasts concerning "Landed Proprietors," "Tenant Farmers," the "Agricultural Interest," "Manure Merchants," and so on, somewhat severely taxing the speaking power of the assembled company in proposing and responding. But when men are in the right vein, it is wonderful what can be done. And that those met to do honour to Sandy Mutch were so needs no better proof than the fact that though the farmer of Dykeside, Francie Futtrit, had stuck to his mean threat of declining to

pay half-a-crown for a dinner ticket, Dykeside's brother, Willie, the coo-couper, of whom we have ere now heard, was there to reply to the toast of "The Cattle Trade;" and moreover, with an eloquence that few men present could have surpassed, even at that stage of the proceedings, to utter his eulogium on the guest of the evening, as a man worthy of their highest esteem and regard—"I've kent 'im for mony a year an' day better nor ony man i' the company, as may weel appear," said Willie Futtrit, "for we're baith i' the same line o' buzness. He begood lang aifter me; an' he's risen—he's risen noo as ye a' ken; an' aw will say that fyoun in oor line's better deservin'. We've hed oor bits o' tifts—fa is't in buzness 't hisna hed their bits o' tifts?—but for a' that—Sawney Mutch, ye're an honest chiel', man: an' aw'll tak' yer han' in mine as leif's mony o' my best freen's.—Fair fa' ye Sawney, man."

Willie Futtrit had "warsl't" up the side of the table a long way from his original position, the intervening space having got thinned by the disappearance of several of the guests. As he uttered the last sentence he suited the action to the word "amid the loud cheers" of his audience, excepting, perhaps, the chairman, who appeared to regard this highly amicable proceeding with unaccountable severity. As the old couper's demonstrativeness did not seem likely to abate, he checked it by calling for the toast o' "The Ladies," which, of course, had to be replied to by the oldest bachelor of the company.

By and bye they had reached the end of the toast list; next they entered upon a miscellaneous series of extemporised additions thereto; and these being ended, Rob Findlater, whose services were deemed worthy of very loud praise, as indeed they received it on the spot, had to reply to the toast of "The Host and Hostess."

And then in due time the party broke up much pleased with themselves and with the whole ongoings of the dinner.

CHAPTER .XI.

THE TENANT OF MILL OF MEADAPLE.

MR. MUTCH, farmer and cattle dealer, Mill of Meadaple, was now a man of the reasonably mature age of thirty-four ; a man in his full prime, in short. Of his status and position, socially and financially, none in his circle could or did entertain a doubt. In his personal aspect, too, he had certain advantages not by any means to be despised among a people with whom the tangible and visibly appreciable are apt to make a deeper impression than the merely ideal or spiritual. His figure—physically as well as mentally, Sandy, as has been already hinted, took after his mother rather than after his father—was distinguished quite as much by fleshy bulkiness, as by symmetry of form. His cheeks, which constituted the main part of the area of a rather good-natured face, were large, though not very bountifully whiskered, his hands also looked large, and still more so his feet ; and he walked with a ponderous rather than elastic swing. His perpendicular height touched six feet ; he had latterly reached the weight of full fourteen stone ; and altogether Mill of Meadaple gave the general onlooker the idea of a man with a very substantial presence.

It was impossible to doubt that, in his chosen line, a man of Sandy's cut and calibre must succeed. And then the public dinner : who could blame Sandy Mutch if he began at length to entertain a somewhat more definite idea of his own importance ? Sandy found himself the object of more profuse attentions from

neighbouring farmers and their wives than ever before; and he had no end of invitations to private entertainments, conducted in the style of laboured hospitality that was common to the region. No wonder if it should come to pass that, during a winter season with a good deal of this sort of social dissipation in it, Sandy Mutch, as a not altogether inapt pupil of his friend Tammis Rorison, the banker, should actually begin, though in rather a deliberate way, to mature his ideas somewhat on the subject of matrimony as an actual event in his own future. Excessive susceptibility to the tender passion did not seem to be Sandy's besetting weakness; at any rate, tenderness of sentiment in the matter did not overbear his other feelings. Yet, now that he had been brought a little more closely in contact with the set of charming and accomplished young ladies to whom his attention had been previously directed, he would have been more than mortal if he could have retained an attitude of entire indifference toward those charms and accomplishments. But it was needful to discriminate, and Sandy Mutch did not doubt his own capacity in that way. The banker had put him in possession of valuable elements in the case, and it would be his own fault if he failed to turn these to the right use. Only he would not consent to be helplessly in leading strings to the banker nor to any one else. "The maiden o' the Muirton," he knew to be worth "a gweed aucht hunner;" and one or two others there were whom he had heard estimated at even a higher rate. The question was how to balance cash against capability of management as mistress of the farm house, so as to strike an absolute value by which one could be fairly compared with another. Questions of personal attraction had, no doubt, to be considered, and allowed for, but the scales must be somewhat nearly balanced before these could be permitted to turn the beam to one side or the other.

In thus finding himself the object of so much atten-

tion among pleasant young ladies, and still more among their expansive and affectionate mothers, Sandy Mutch, in sober truth, was in no little danger of being spoilt, and had, I think, actually begun to get a little light-headed. He had penetration enough to see that apart from his own personal attractions, those belongings of his, in the shape of a fine farm and handsome residence, were the means of exciting the extremely favourable regards of the matron part of his acquaintance; and, by a not very intricate process of reasoning, he had arrived at the notion that what was so attractive to the mothers, would not be altogether matter of indifference to the daughters. As for the male part of the community, it was well known that the prevalent sentiment regarding matrimonial engagements was purely utilitarian. They did not talk about a young man or a young woman making a suitable match. What they said was "a gweed bargain;" and that, on the part of either man or woman, directly implied the acquisition of money or its equivalent in the transaction.

That this view of holy matrimony had been formally pressed upon Sandy Mutch we already know; that it had found acceptance, and was growing in favour with him, there seemed every reason to believe. Yet somehow Sandy appeared to be in no such urgent haste to marry, as might in the circumstances have been expected. A whole year and more had elapsed, and though he was spoken of in a general way as the sweet-heart of several young ladies—and in the case of the maiden of the Muirton, there were colourable grounds for saying that he had paid greater attentions than Platonic friendship would justify—still matters remained in *statu quo*, as it concerned the domesticities of Mill of Meadaple; and Sandy was still a bachelor.

"Weary set that chiel," said Tammas Rorison the banker, "he has seerly nae taste ava; an' sae mony bonny, weel-tocher't lasses i' the pairt jist in aweers o' bein' o' the gimmer hillock." But the banker had even

gone the length of remonstrating more seriously with his client, reminding him that his account was now in a state that gave him ground to press the point. Sandy, in an entirely easy and jocular tone, said, "Ou, we'll maybe get accommodation owre the road!" He meant at the rival bank; but jocular as the remark was, the banker did not half like it, and distinctly indicated a disposition to be sharp. Sandy took the matter with much equanimity, however; and was understood to have thereafter uttered the remark that the banker "mith jist kweel i' the skin that he het in," a somewhat rash speech on his part it might be.

Matters had gone on in this way for a while, but at last something like a crisis came. Dame Rumour had set more definite reports than hitherto afloat; and it was thus that Bowbutts and his neighbour Burnside discussed the matter:—

"They say Mull o' Meadaple is to be marriet at the lang length," observed Bowbutts.

"Ou yea! Weel Muirton an' the goodwife hae wrocht sair for 't, ye maun alloo, lat aleen the Miss 'ersel," replied Burnside.

"But aw'm nae vera seer, man, 't it's nae a' up in that quarter," said Bowbutts.

"Hoot, fye! It's been thocht to be as gweed's sattl't 't he was takin' the maiden," exclaimed Bowbutts's friend with some surprise.

"Weel aw dinna doot but there mith'a been something o't. But Gowanies an' some o' them hed been ha'ein' a hyse wi' 'im the tither nicht aifter the market, fan Sawney was a wee thochtie sprung, an' Gowanies was tellin' me that he hed bann't at Muirton like a' thing fan they ca'd 'im's gweedfader; an' taul' them that he kent faur to get a wife wantin' Muirton or ony ither ane."

"Ay, ay, man. But aifter'n a' the lassie's seerly gweed aneuch a' wye for him though he be a muckle man noo-a-days."

“Lickly. Still an’ on, Muirton has a big faimily, ye ken. He canna hae a byous soom to gie ’er for a tocher.”

“True; but for a’ that, man—Muirton has gryte enfluence amo’ the muckle fowk.”

“Ou ay, there’s his twa sins that he’s pitten ino gweed places; but the moggan maun hae been geylies socht afore he gat them set doon faur they are.”

“Ay, but the aul’est ane ’s marriet, ye ken, an’ gat an’ ondeemas thing o’ siller wi’ s wife; an’ the tither ane, they tell me, ’s to be a bridegreem immedantly, wi’ a dother o’ aul’ Peter Lipp o’ Backfaul’, Muirton’s nain cousin.”

“Hoot fye! Weel, man, it’s exterordinar’ foo they’ve marrie’t throu’ ither that fowk—cousins an’ secon’t cousins—aye keepin’ the clossach thegither fan they cud.”

“Oh, they’ve been a grippie, wily set, for mony a year an’ day, an’ Muirton braks naething aff fae the best o’ them. Man, gin he cud ’a gotten Mull o’ Meadaple, wi’ fat himsel’ and the sins thegither hae, they wud ’a hed a haill kwindra side amo’ them.”

“Weel; but it seems Sawney Mutch is nae takin’ the maiden. They say there’s some ither ane o’ the go wi’ ’im worth about a thoosan’ at onyrate—so Gowanies an’ them wus tellin’ me,” said Bowbutts.

“Sang, I dinna ken; aw’m jist raither dootin’ Sawney’s latt’n Muirton get the eemost grip wi’ ’im. He’ll better tak’ care o’ ’imself,” answered Burnside thoughtfully.

“Fat wye, man?”

“Weel, ye see, Muirton’s been owre at the Mull toon ilka ither day for raiths past. I’ve seen ’im wi’ my nain een; haikin’ throu’ the feedles the tae time, an’ in’o the byres the neist, ’s gin a’ thing about the toon war’s nain.”

“My certy, gin that be the gate o’ ’t, Sawney ’ll better ca’ canny!”

“ Ay wull he. It wudna be for pure love an' freen'-ship to him 't a' that wud be gaen on. An' gin he try to play protticks wi' Muirton, he'll maybe grip him as ticht 's vera mony.”

Evidently, if the under-current of gossip should turn out to have its origin in reliable matter of fact, Sandy Mutch was getting into somewhat critical circumstances.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COUPER'S WOOING.

THAT Sandy Mutch was about to get married seemed at last to have become a matter of something like absolute certainty. The symptoms were hardly to be mistaken, and, in fact, gave birth to any amount of pleasant gossip all over the region where Sandy was so well known. Who the fortunate lady of his choice was to be was still a matter of some doubt, to be sure ; but for purposes of gossip this was not by any means a disadvantage. Not fewer than four or five farmer's daughters had been more or less confidently assigned to our hero. Yet the only distinct evidence available on the precise point in hand was of a negative kind. Two, at least, of the young ladies who had been spoken of were known to have given utterance to emphatic and somewhat bitter declarations to the effect that they " wud see 'im far aneuch ere they wud hae 'im ; muckle, vulgar, couper slype." It was very clear that none of these entertained the faintest hope of becoming Mrs. Mutch, the goodwife of Mill of Meadaple. Two or three had not spoken out, however, or had spoken only in terms capable of a double construction ; and among these latter was the maiden of the Muirton, and a lady not hitherto mentioned in this chronicle—Jean, elder daughter of Francie Futtrit, farmer of Dykeside. The status and position of the maiden have been so far indicated ; the maiden herself was a young lady of twenty-seven, who had got all the advantages, educationally, that a very respectable boarding school in the

county town could give her. She was well bred when occasion required, and even laboriously polite. A stout blonde, with abundance of colour in her cheeks, and who had in good measure the family characteristics of carefulness and politic caution, rather than anything in the nature of impulsiveness or too easy confidence. Miss Futtrit was several years the maiden's senior—so, at least, it was said; nobody would have dogmatized on the point—and in the matter of social status she could not by any means cope with the maiden. Most certainly Muirton and his wife would have scorned to invite Dykeside and his daughter to one of the premier parties held at their house, and to which the chief residents in the parish were invited. Sandy Mutch could not but be aware of this. But Dykeside's family (he was a widower) consisted of no more than two daughters; and as Dykeside had amassed very industriously for a lifetime, and been also fortunate enough to come in as heir to several relatives of like habits, it was certain that each of his daughters would have a very handsome "tocher." The "thoosan' poun'" spoken of was probably not an over-estimate, and it exceeded the tocher assigned to the maiden of the Muirton. Miss Futtrit had not had the advantage of a finished education, yet was she reputed to be a good housewife. An industrious person, and thrifty in the last degree, in harmonious accord with the example set by her father; and, as her position in the household had practically been that of mistress for several years, there had been good scope for the exercise of these virtues. Though slightly diminutive in person, and not so erect in figure as she might have been—probably an effect of her plodding on so diligently at the daily drudgery of the farm house—these were hardly appreciable drawbacks. And if her complexion lost something, on the side of sallowness, by comparison with the maiden's, had not Sandy Mutch, on the other hand, heard her defined by competent critics of

the milder type as "a settin' deemie, an' a feerious eident creatur'."

Now, there could be no doubt of the fact that, in contemplating the subject of matrimony, Sandy Mutch had thought of the Maiden of the Muirton—thought of her over and over again. Perhaps he had spoken to her in what the maiden accepted as the language of courtship; perhaps Sandy had at times meant his words to have a bias that way; perhaps he had not calculated their precise drift always, for I don't think he was skilful in the matter of uttering tender somethings or nothings. Certainly, in his later intercourse with Miss Futtrit, however—or at any rate with her father—he had thrown a kind of business earnestness into the proceedings. In purchasing a pair of fat stots from Dykeside, when the old man was in high good humour, at the long price—"saxty poun', an' them only aff twa year aul'"—Sandy took the opportunity of observing—

"Ye'll mak a perfeck bing o' siller this sizzon wi' sic prices."

"Na, na; it's the like o' you't can turn a penny fan beasts grows daar—I've deen better mony a year," said Dykeside.

"Ye'll sell anither half a dizzen i' the coorse o' the winter?"

"A' that at ony rate; an' maybe a pair o' foreigners to haud it haill wi'. But that's twa wauchty beasts o' their age, min' ye."

Sandy Mutch pondered on Dykeside's reply for a minute. He knew his rent, which was small indeed, relatively to such an "out-turn" of cattle. It seemed certain then that Dykeside must be making money fast; yet he said he had done even better formerly. Sandy remembered that Dykeside's family consisted of two daughters; and, after a pause, he suddenly exclaimed,

"Aw 'm sayin', Dykies, your Jean wud be a capital wife to me!"

"Hoot, Mully; ye're aye haverin' aboot something," was Dykeside's reply.

"Aw 'm nae jokin', though, eenoo," said Sandy seriously.

"Weel, weel, man, ye sud ken best; an' foo mony mair hae ye socht?"

"Aw 'm tellin' ye the Gweed's trowth, Dykies. As sure's deith, aw wud like Jean at the term!"

"Hoot, hoot; I canna spare Jean, eenoo, at ony rate."

"But ye ken I *am* to be mairriet; an' ye 'll hae to spare 'er, in coorse!"

"Weel," answered Dykeside reflectively, "but I can-not spare 'er at Whitsunday ony wye. It's nonsense to speak aboot it—aw canna dee wuntin 'er."

"But I'm nae sae deen hurriet wi' t gin't war to pit you aboot," continued Sandy; "we cud wyte a fyou months."

"Gin she be willin' ye mith get 'er aboot Mairtimas. Ye can speer at 'er. Jean has a min' o' 'er nain; an' I sanna mak' nor meddle farrer wi' t," said Dykeside, who, like other people, was by no means insensible to the attractions offered by a man occupying such an eligible position as that of Sandy Mutch.

Upon this "precunnance" matters stood; and as murder will out, the report had by-and-by assumed quite a definite form and become known to nearly everybody who cared to take the least interest in it.

It was not at all odd that among the very last to get the authentic report in any articulate form were the family of the Muirton. People rather suspected the news might excite a little soreness of feeling in that quarter; and thus they were wary enough to keep off the subject, aye and until a certain matron of the place, who at suitable times was privileged to pour her confidences into the ear of the goodwife of the Muirton, could carry the burden no longer, and with a due sense of the responsibility of further reticence, delivered there the intelligence that—"The man o' Mull o' Meadaple's takin' the deemie Futtrit; Dykie's dother; peer,

warsh, blinterin thing ; but fat is 't that fowk winna dee for siller ! Na, na ; it's nae ca'd aboot clype nor teethless said-sae ; they 're to be marriet i' the tail o' hairst, aw b'leive."

The goodwife of the Muirton was a prudent woman, and she maintained her composure wonderfully in presence of her visitor. But on that same evening it was obscurely understood that the maiden had been in a state of rather pronounced excitement, partly through vexation, and partly from the state of high indignation to which her feelings had risen at the thought of Sandy Mutch's very treacherous behaviour to herself, for the facts had been stated with a circumstantiality and minuteness that left no doubt of their substantial truth. "Amen's" of Sandy was the resource that had occurred to her mother and herself, and which they had looked at in various forms, including that of the ordinary legal procedure against him, before Muirton himself returned from a market at which he had been absent. This remeid of law they hastened to press on the attention of Muirton at once, as soon as he had been informed of the facts of the case.

"Weesht, weesht," exclaimed that shrewd agriculturist, "Dinna speak nonsense ; ye hinna a scraip o' 's vreet o' nae kin-kin' though 't war naething ither."

"But fa cud expeck to hae 's vreet ?" exclaimed the goodwife of the Muirton in an excited key. "He's nae ane that ever was gryte shot at the pen. Hooever, fan it comes to that, I'se be a witness mysel', an' maybe tell fat 'll gar 'im luik as blate's ony vreet cud dee—slung that he is !"

"Aw mith 'a expeckit something o' this kin'," continued Muirton in a soliloquising tone. "He's been keepin' sae weel oot o' my road this file. But they gae far aboot 't never meets—Na, I sawna 'im i' the market."

"Wasna he there ?"

"Of coorse he was there."

"Weel, man, ye 'll jist tak' advice upon 't at ance ;

ye're nae to lat 'im throu' yer fingers like a k-notless thread," pursued the goodwife.

To this appeal Muirton replied none otherwise than by a gesture indicative of impatience. He exhorted, almost commanded his wife and daughter to discard sentimental exhibitions, and maintain a resolute silence on the subject. What more was to happen Muirton indicated not by word or look, albeit his whole bearing was that of a man, who if he had not already matured a plan, had at least in his head the elements of one that was likely to take definite form, and be put decisively in force without much loss of time.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COUPER "BUIKET."

NEXT morning, Muirton was stirring about betimes. He despatched the business that lay to his hand in the way of issuing orders through his grieve to guide the work of the farm for the day. Then he went to breakfast, and, by the time he had finished, his gig was at the door waiting him.

It was to the Burgh Muirton wished to drive. What his thoughts were by the way it would not be easy to divine, for Muirton was a man who could well keep his counsel to himself when occasion required. That Sandy Mutch occupied some part of them it was reasonable to believe; and that the farm of Mill of Meadaple occupied fully as large a part was no less credible. In the course of certain recent perambulations which he had got into the habit of making about that place, as we have already learned, it was undeniable that Muirton's affection for Mill of Meadaple had warmed up strongly. As he jogged along in the gig the road took him round directly below the finest fields on the farm. A weaker man might have felt it hard to resist the impulse to drive up to the farm house and tackle the farmer at once. Muirton merely twisted himself half-way round in the gig at the point where the best view of Mill of Meadaple house and farm was to be had, took a deliberate survey, and resuming his proper attitude, as he stimulated his nag to a smarter pace, muttered, "It'll rin hard wi' him an' me tee ere I lose the grip o't."

When he had reached the burgh, Muirton made his way first and specially to the office of Sandy Mutch's banker, Tammas Rorison. The banker and Muirton were friends of long standing; and in the particular circumstances of the case, Muirton naturally wished to consult the banker. He told Tammas this in the fullest confidence; whether he told or desired to tell him his whole mind on the subject is another matter. It was scarcely right or fair, perhaps, to trouble the banker; but Muirton understood that he had largely befriended the young man; had indeed been the means of his occupying the specially-favoured position he did, and therefore Muirton, with great reluctance, had come to the conclusion that it was right the banker should know the exact position of affairs as between Sandy Mutch and his, Muirton's, daughter. He was very sorry—knowing the interest the banker had taken in Sandy Mutch, he regretted it exceedingly. And, therefore, though paternal duty laid its own stern demands upon him—though the case was altogether a very aggravated one, and the farmer of Mill of Meadaple completely open to very serious consequences pecuniarily—Muirton, so he said, was quite disposed to have the matter settled quietly, on terms which should be as little damaging to the offending party as the strict requirements of justice would admit of. This, in the simplicity of his heart he desired to confide to the banker as a very particular and valued personal friend. And, coming to the point at once, he had merely to say that though he could not accept of a farthing less than eight hundred pounds—not a farthing—(if the law were preferred, double that amount must be demanded at the very least)—he was willing to take five hundred pounds cash down, and Mutch's bill for the balance at six months' date, as it might be inconvenient for him to pay over the whole amount at once.

Tammas Rorison listened to Muirton's recital in a state of mind largely compounded of anger and surprise,

yet all the while concentrating his attention in a reasonable degree upon Muirton's diplomatic way of putting the case.

"The mortal idiot!" said the banker. "Fa ever heard o' the like. Francie Futtrit's dother goodwife o' the brawest hoose i' the haill pairis'; a creatur that never was a score o' miles fae hame in 'er lifetime; an' kens o' naething but grubbin' awa' at a' kin' o' ploiterie wark, oot an' in, wi' tacketie sheen as grey's the tod on 'er feet, an' her han's like the vera horn!"

"It wud appear that that's the man's choice, siclike as it is," said Muirton, with a well-assumed air of indifference. "Hooever!"

"Jean Futtrit in a drawin'-room wi' a Brussels carpet on't? Peer woman; she's muckle liker her nain sett wi' the yird fleer aneth 'er feet and the timmer bauks abeen 'er heid."

"Weel, ye see, I thocht it richt to lat you ken afore I gaed forder a-len'th, kennin' 'im to be a particular customer wi' you. The man'll nae doot get a triffle; but it mith like aneuch blaud's credit sae far, fan't war't kent that he hed a big soom to pay to oor lassie, owre an' abeen payin' the lawvyers." And as Muirton spoke he kept quietly watching the effect of his words on the banker.

"An' I've nae doot she'll suffer a muckle main disappointment forbye," said that worthy, with an equivocal twinkle. "She wud be sair smitten wi' 'im, aw'm weel seer?"

"Ou, weel," replied Muirton, in a more business-like tone. "It's naitral to think that the like o' oor Nancy wud be better confeerin to ane in a toon like yon, nor a creatur 't's never seen ocht nor flee ootwith a stob-thackit hoose, wi' a but an' a ben, though her fader be weel aneuch upon't."

"Nae doot; only Dykeside'll keep a gweed aneuch grip o' ilka saxpence that he has till he ken fat for; or it cheats me. So it wudna be muckle to be won'er't at

though Sandy mith fin' 'imsel' in a ticht aneuch nyeuk to turn in."

"Ou weel, there's nae ane can blame me for grippin' 'im in aboot at this time."

"'Deed no, Muirton; an' we hed 'im here we sud gi'e 'im a grip that he wud fin' till 's finger points maybe."

"Will ye be seein' 'im shortly likein?" asked Muirton.

"See 'im or no see 'im," said Tammas Rorison, "I'se gi'e 'im three lines o' my min' this vera nicht.— Rest yer shanks twa minutes there."

The banker went to his desk and set resolutely to writing, jerking his spectacles up to the top of his forehead as he began. When he had finished, he dabbed the written side of the sheet on his blotting pad, and after scanning the page, handed it to Muirton for his perusal.

"Um-hum," said Muirton in a deliberate tone handing the letter back to be folded.

"Ye mith dee waur man nor tak' the bit missive i' yer han'," observed the banker as he finished that operation.

To the banker's proposal Muirton made some slight demur. It was like asking him to stoop so low as seek the presence of a man upon whom he had made up his mind to operate through a third party in the person of his legal agent. But Tammas knew better.

"Na, na, Muirton," said he,—

"The law's a draw-wall unco deep,
Without a rim fowk oot to keep;
But ance ye're in
Ye'll fin' the gate baith stey an' steep
Ere oot ye win."

But ye're nae sae bauch hertit man. Tak' ye that till 'im, an' ye'll ken foo to dee aifterhin yersel'. There's naething like takin' a hardy grip, an' syne ca' the nail to the heid fan ye hae the chance."

Muirton took the banker's letter without further ado, simply observing, "I ken aw can lippen to you; but ve'll need to pit in a back chap gin 't be necessar."

“Fear na ye man,” said the banker. “My compliments to the goodwife; an’ tell ye Nancy that an’ t’ warnna that weary rheumatics I wud be practeesin’ my steps for ’er waddin’, for a this bit caper o’ Sandy’s.”

Ah! Sandy Mutch; little dost thou know what has been brewing for thee! Whilst thou hast been resting thy loving thoughts on the charms of Jean Futtrit of Dykeside, and hast even ridden a couple of miles out of thy way to do somewhat in furtherance of thy suit so auspiciously begun with Dykeside for possession of the person of his daughter, two men a good deal more astute than thyself have been coolly framing a method to upset thy purpose. And now, as thou approachest Mill of Meadaple, on thy homeward way, who should be facing thee at thine own door, with countenance bespeaking unmistakable resolution, but the goodman of the Muirton—the very man of all others thou wert least desirous to see!

The time for circuitous operations was clearly at an end. And it was of no use attempting evasion of the inevitable. Before Muirton had uttered a single word, Sandy Mutch instinctively felt that the cool, long-headed senior was “too many” for him; and when Muirton, after a curt salutation, and the remark that he would require a few words with him in a quiet way, pulled out Tammas Rorison’s missive, and bade him “read that!” Sandy saw that the case was as good as “up” for him. He painfully spelt over the banker’s letter, which was in entire accordance with that gentleman’s spoken sentiments, and, moreover, contained a very plain hint in few words, that to prefer Miss Futtrit to the maiden of the Muirton would simply be equivalent to a prompt stoppage of his credit under circumstances the most disadvantageous to him; let alone the special vengeance of Muirton and Muirton’s daughter, which he must face as he best could. Sandy Mutch was not aware that the drift of the letter had been made fully known to Muirton by its writer, and

he endeavoured in a vague and clumsy way to fence with Muirton, when asked point blank to give an explicit statement concerning his matrimonial intentions. He even went the length, when closely pressed, of averring that there was "naething mair atween him an' Jean Futtrit than there mith be atween him an' ither half-a-dizzen."

"Sae muckle the better for ye, Sandy, man; gin that be the gate o' t' ye'll mak' nae words to gae owre bye to the dominie wi' me at ance till we get your intentions pitten in black an' fite."

"Nae to be buiket wi' your Nancy?" exclaimed Sandy in wondering tones.

"An' fat for no?"

"Aw cudna dee that ony wye.—Nae the nicht!"

"Jist please yersel', than," said Muirton drily. "Ye ken baith the tae side o' the stank an' the tither noo—tak' yer choice."

"But ye wudna hae me to gae there eenoo, seerly? I haena spoken to Nancy hersel'," pleaded Sandy.

"Ye'll speak neen the waur to Nancy fan we've that pint sattl't," replied the inexorable Muirton. "Ye seerly forget that I'm'er fader; an' fat kin' o' eesage ye've been gi'ein' me an' my faimily. I thocht Maister Rorison hed taul' ye plain aneuch to fesh ye to yer senses; but gin ye winna hear rizzon fae him nor me, ye can jist mak up yer min' to pay me doon that aucht hunner poun'; or say 't ye winna dee 't, an' I'll ken fat wye to turn the kinkin pin upo' ye at ance."

To attempt further resistance was of no use. Sandy Mutch scratched his head, looked apoplectic, smote his hand on his thigh with something like a muttered oath and—succumbed to his destiny. That very evening his ruthless mentor and he sought the presence of the dominie in company; and that functionary in his capacity of session clerk, with sundry remarks of a gratulatory and humorous sort, over which he got into

a state of effusive geniality, "booked" the declared wish of Alexander Mutch, farmer, Mill of Meadaple, to have duly proclaimed in the parish church for the first time on the forthcoming Sabbath day, that he had formed a purpose of marriage with Agnes, daughter of Adam Ironside, farmer in Muirton of Inverdeen.

On the same evening when bank hours were past, and Tammas Rorison had betaken himself to his easy-chair and his newspaper, Tammas's wife who sat with her feet on the fender and darned her husband's stockings, resumed a conversation which had been interrupted shortly before, in these words:—

"But fat need hed ye to interfere ava, man; mithna he be as weel wi' the ane as the ither?"

"Ye're jist like a' yer kin', 'oman," said Tammas, over the top of his paper; "sair exerceeds't aboot sma' points, fan a maitter o' matrimony comes o' the carpet."

"Weel, I think the lass o' Dykeside's perfectly suitable for ony vulgar chiel like Sandy Mutch; an' if it be siller, they say she has mair nor Miss Ironside."

"An' ye think Sandy ocht to tak' 'er?"

"Weel I think it's real ill usage to the lass if he dinna aifter he's gane so far."

Tammas Rorison was reading some passage that interested him at the moment; he was silent for a little, and then allowing the paper to drop on his knee, he remarked

"Ye think the deemie Futtrit's gettin' ill usage?"

"'Deed I dee so man."

"Weel, 'oman," said Tammas, "that's jist fat I wud expect. It wud be a queer wardle an' women fowk hed leave to rowle a' thing their ain wye. There wud be fyou unmairriet men, or aiven laddies oot o' their short jackets, for ae thing. An' mony a sad pirn wud there be ere ye gat them a' splic't on the principle o' pure love an' affection."

"Hoot, man, fa's speakin' o' love an' affection, it's only fa has maist bawbees for that maitter."

"There ye go," exclaimed Tammas. "Aye at extremes; but that winna dee cither—it's nae a mere question o' fa has maist bawbees."

"Fat is't than? Siller's a principal pairt; an' the lass has the biggest tocher o' the twa. An' for the lave o't she's gi'en proof that she's a capable manager."

"An' the maiden o' the Muirton hisna; jist so," said Tammas who had now got into an erect position and stood with his back to the fire in his favourite attitude. "Weel, aboot'er siller. Francie Futtrit keep's his Accoont at the office owre the road, ye ken. An' fat syne—I'm nae dootin 't he may be worth a' 't they say—but do ye think it likely't my neebour wud encourage Francie to tak up ilka penny o' the deemie's tocher an' han' 't owre to Sandy Mutch as seen as ever the twa war made ae flesh; supposin' aye that the creatur war dispos't to dee onything o' the sort; an' that's makin' a wide supposition? Nae till he kent fat for; an' foo far it mith be possible to grip Tammas Rorison intill a corner. An' pittin' the maitter at fat ye may ca' its braidest—Supposin' Sandy war transferr't, stock, lock, an' barrel, to the custody o' oor neebour an' Francie Futtrit. Do ye mean to tell me that that wud be onything short o' ruinous to the lad—to be at the merciment o' twa creaturs like them; a dry't up whingein' bodie 't's kittle aneuch it may be amo' bills an' bank credits, but awa fae the office dask hisna the smeddum o' a new spean't calf; an' a nabal earthworm like Dykeside? Na; na, 'oman. They hae neither sense nor mense to hae in their han's in ony sic menner. They wud ca' 'im to the gowff in a towmon's time."

"Hoot, fye man," said Mrs. Rorison; "ye're forgettin' that he's weel able to tak care o' 'imsel'."

"I'm forgettin' nae pairt o' the concern," answered Tammas. "The prime an' only notable faculty o' Sandy Mutch is that he can buy nowte. Gweed kens fat wye the gift's come to him, as it's come to mony anither thick skull't breet. Only it's there; an' he'll

haud's ain wi' men that cairry three times his brains, as far as rinnin' owre the quality, wecht, an' vailue o' a fat ox is concern't. But though ye hae the couper faculty there, the business is to keep it gaen safely for 'imsel' an' ither fowk—to gi'e rope aneuch an' nae owre muckle, an' rin 'im up ticht at the dykeside fan needs be, 's we've jist been tryin' to dee. Noo, I flatter mysel' 't I've ta'en aboot as muckle oot o' 'im first an' last as maist men wud hae deen; an' made a braw man o' 'im wi' 't a'. An' fan it's come to this point wi' 't, I wud surely be mair nor unfaithfu' to my chairge to lose a' interest in 'im, an' disoblæge a gweed customer forbye."

"Weel, they're a bonnie pair Muirton an' him—I kenna which is warst; but it's a queer wye o' woin' sure aneuch," said Mrs. Rorison.

"Ou maybe," said Tammas. "But we needna gae into fat ye may ca' the ethics o' the maitter. I've liv't lang aneuch i' the wardle to ken the advantage o' jist makin' up yer min' to big yer dyke wi' the steens 't ye can get at the fit o' 't. An' though it may be my luck to big wi' roch haethens in place o' dress't san'stane or polish't marble, tak' ye my word for't there's a hantle o' the successfu' business o' life, in a' ranks, carriet throu o' the vera same principle."

Perhaps Mrs. Rorison was convinced; perhaps she merely thought it was no use endeavouring to convince Tammas that there was any room for sentiment in the matter beyond that for which he had made provision.

CHAPTER XIV.

BUSKIN' FOR THE BRIDAL.

IF the goodman of the Muirton returned to his home on the evening of the day of which we have last spoken with the feeling of a man, who, for once at least, has done his duty to himself and his family, he was to be excused, if not also commended. And that evening Muirton unquestionably occupied a high position in the estimation of his wife as a man of sagacious instincts and diplomatic capacity. With his daughter, the feeling was one of a mixed kind; and no wonder if the young lady was just a little "fluttered" by the tidings her father had brought.

"But, papa, how cud you go to the session-clark? I hedna time to think about it at all!"

"Plenty o' time yet for a' 't's adee, Nancy. Ye're to be crie't the first time only, on Sunday, and the dominie 'll lat on to nae ane till than. This is Feers-day, an' ye can mak the waddin' this day three ouks."

"An' besides, I know he socht Jean Futtrit," said the maiden, in a burst of excitement that threatened to go in the direction of hysterics. "But he *did* seek 'er!"

"It maksna futher he socht Jean Futtrit or no; he's nae buiket wi' Jean Futtrit," was Muirton's sharp and sententious reply.

"Na; an' lat ye Jean Futtrit tak on 'ersel'," exclaimed the goodwife, who now came to her husband's aid vigorously. "Impident cutty 't she is. Set her up for ony sic mailin'! Aw won'er fat creaturs 'll come till neist. It wud set 'er better to pit a decent Sunday sark on 'er peer fader, an' make 'im some wisse-like amo' ither fowk fan he gaes fae hame."

“An’ perhaps they’ll go to law wi’ him,” continued the perturbed maiden; “an’ him need to gae to coorts aifter hin’.”

“Buff an’ nonsense! Lat them try themsel’s,” said Muirton. “It’ll be lang to the day that Francie Futtrit’ll throw awa’ gweed siller seekin’ ill. Sawney ’imsel’ maist thocht shame to mak’ a scoug o’ that—mean, ill-fashion’t creatur; min’ fat wye he affrontit the hail pairis’ at the time o’ the enterteenment.”

“An’ ye may say’t, man; an’ foo muckle obleeg’t they war to you—aw’m seer Dykeside mith ’a thocht shame to hear Mull o’ Meadaple mention’t aifter’t; lat aleen tryin’ to insnorl the peer guileless lad in ony sic menner.”

“An’ forbye that, Maister Mutch kens brawly fa’s the maist suitin’ wife for a place like his,” said Muirton, in a softer and more soothing tone.

“Eh, but aw aye thocht it a richt bonny pairt; an’ yon hoose so weel seetiwat. Fa cud think o’ ony ane gyaun into sic a dwallin’ ’t hedna a providin’ confeerin—an’ lat aleen a’ ither thing, the creatur cudna ’a hed a decent cairt-load o’ things to tak wi’ ’er oot o’ yon hovel—it’s oonpossible,” exclaimed the goodwife, with emotion.

“I sud think the like o’ Tammas Rorison ken’t fat was richt an’ proper as weel’s fat the law wud alloo in ony case o’ the kin’; a man ’t’s hed sae muckle expairience in a’ kin’ o’ buzness, an’ been rowlin’ elyer owre an’ owre again,” observed Muirton. “An’ I’se asseer ye he wasna lang o’ pittin’ ’s fit upo’ ony sic unseemly proposal.”

“He’s a weel principl’t an’ a muckle respeckit man; there’s fyou minasters aiven like ’im,” said the goodwife.

“An’ he as gweed’s promis’t to coontenance your mairraige, Nancy, ’oman, an’ ’t war sae,” added Muirton by way of climax.

The maiden of the Muirton was largely soothed and

comforted, and, on the whole, fairly reconciled to her position and somewhat suddenly ripened prospect. She now desired to know when her lover would come to prosecute his suit. "The morn's nicht," said her father, who had not omitted the arrangement of that part; and punctual to his engagement, Sandy Mutch made his appearance at the time specified.

The reception of the truant lover by his prospective mother-in-law, who met him at the door, was not only cordial, but marked by sundry sallies of jocularly, during which Sandy's tactics and tergiversations as a wooer were broadly and hilariously hinted at; the worthy woman, with no intention evidently but that of applying an adage fitly, also reminding the young people, in her own phraseology, of the well-known fact that the course of true love never did run smooth. But all's well that ends well; and so notably in affairs of the heart, thought the goodwife of the Muirton. The behaviour of the lovers, if quieter and less demonstrative than that of the goodwife, soon became sufficiently unconstrained to allow the business of courtship, which might now be said to have reached an entirely practical stage, to go on with the requisite facility in its prescribed channel; and before Sandy Mutch left for Mill of Meadaple on that evening, it was wonderful to think of the highly satisfactory and confidential footing on which he stood with the whole family of the Muirton.

Poor Jean Futtrit! Till Sunday came, and the banns were formally "cried" for the first time, the secret was perfectly kept. It was even averred that the precentor had been instigated to gabble the names over so that nobody might catch them; or know who had formed a purpose of marriage. But perhaps this was a mere slander. And even if the precentor had been sufficiently false to statutory duty to follow such corrupt advices, it would have been of no use, for the parishioners in general would have been at the bottom of the matter at whatever expenditure of time and

trouble. At any rate, Jean Futtrit's eye and ear were too quick to be deceived in any such clumsy fashion. Jean knew instantly from the man's very glance, furtively thrown towards her, sitting in her back pew, as he entered the lateran, and lifted his paper to "cry," that something of an ominous sort concerning herself was on hand; and she heard the names which were read off as the throng of parishioners were pushing along the "pass" with the utmost distinctness. She heard them, and she did not start up to forbid the banns. On the contrary, Jean Futtrit sat at the moment and throughout the service with an air of the utmost composure, betraying neither by look nor gesture the faintest indication of consciousness that her attitude was keenly scanned by many a peering worshipper, or that her presence there had for once served to secure for the Rev. Dawvid Macdrousie a less somnolent if not more attentive audience than he was accustomed to have.

To say that Jean Futtrit was perfectly indifferent to what had emerged, or that there did not forthwith spring up in her bosom a certain desire for revenge, would be to say that she was either more or less than a woman. Jean felt that she ought at any rate to say some expressly bitter words, perhaps to do one or two things that neither Sandy Mutch nor the Maiden of the Muirton, against whom her animosity rose quite as strongly, could feel to be either complimentary or pleasant. Beyond this she had not yet fixed upon any definite scheme of vengeance. But some time must still elapse before the marriage could be consummated; and that time would, no doubt, bring its own opportunities. In the meanwhile Jean, in so far as she made herself visible to the neighbourhood, continued to be the cynosure of many eyes; or, as Bowbutts phrased it, "She was a mair thocht o' 'oman than ever she was; an' they cud but get anou' ban' wi' 'er, an' hear Jean pit oot 'er breath upon 'im." But in this their desires were not gratified.

CHAPTER XV.

WAITING FOR THE HAPPY HOUR.

IN the days that preceded his wedding, Sandy Mutch had a good deal of business on hand over and above his ordinary operations in cattle dealing. The marriage preparations he felt to be onerous, not to say irksome; only it fortunately happened that, as time drew on, his prospective mother-in-law gradually put her hand a little further in, and relieved him correspondingly, by suggesting, and also working out her own suggestions.

"Hoot, noo," said the goodwife, "an't warn a the ladies, you men fowk hae nae contrivance about a hoose ava; ye'll jist get yer nain moder to come to Mill o' Meadaple an' set maitters in order for the hame comin'."

Probably the goodwife did not very sincerely wish this arrangement to be carried out. It was doubtful if Sandy Mutch's mother would have willingly undertaken such duties on her own undivided responsibility. Her husband, the souter, emphatically discountenanced her doing anything of the kind; and it was against his express desire that she arranged to meet the goodwife of the Muirton on the subject, which meeting enabled the goodwife to get "the hank" sufficiently in "her ain hand," without the appearance, as she thought, of seizing it too openly.

The wedding was to be a very grand affair. Sandy, when once fairly in for it, would have liked it over both quickly and quietly. The truth of the matter was that he lived in serious dread of Jean Futtrit, Jean's father, or Jean's legal representative turning up

in some fashion decidedly uncomfortable for him. But no; it did not suit the bride, still less the bride's mother, to have things hurried over in that way. Not only decency and order must be had respect to, but befitting pomp as well, and in particular the bride's *trousseau*, a very splendid one—which, for the encouragement of native industry, had been entrusted to the local "mantie-makker," in place of being ordered from the county metropolis—could not be finished in a day. So Sandy had to exercise what patience he could. At the markets he kept his eyes about him, lest they should encounter in undesired proximity the figure of Francie Futtrit of Dykeside; and oftener than once he had writhed under the impression that Jean was actually upon him with purposes of vengeance. It was Jean unmistakably that he had seen once and again pass and re-pass 'twixt Dykeside and the Burgh or elsewhere, but in place of turning in to Mill of Meadaple, with a vehement accusation of faithlessness against the master of that holding, the little stooping figure plodded on its way—going and coming as if no such place as Mill of Meadaple had been visible in the landscape. Yet something must surely be "up," for in ordinary times it was the rarest thing possible to see Jean Futtrit abroad, away from the unremitting toils of her industrious life. So thought Sandy Mutch; but very possibly it was only Sandy's own guilty conscience that had set his imagination at work in the matter.

Anyhow, it came to pass that, with the trifling exception of jibes rather unsparingly flung out by his brother traders in cattle, as opportunity offered—and Sandy showed less tact than he might have done in steering clear of the more demonstrative of them for the time—nothing of an overt kind had happened to disturb the even flow of blissful anticipation in Sandy Mutch's mind. Of his professional brethren, the least good natured in his style of address was our old friend Willie Futtrit. They met and met again on market days during Sandy Mutch's bridegroom era, which was

rather a lengthened one ; and on these occasions the force and intensity of Willie's speech depended upon the hour of the day and the number of his completed or attempted transactions. He described poor Sandy publicly, and very audibly, as a "men-sworn scoon'rel." "My breeder's dother cud seen pit you aneth the weathercock, man," exclaimed Willie in stentorian tones, with a round score of butchers and traffickers in cattle among his audience—"Ou, ye wud strike an' aul' man, wud ye, as ye've deen afore—ye cooardy fleep! Man, gin I hed been a dizzen o' year younger, I wud a tann't the muckle fozy hide o' ye the richt gate!"

"Go at 'im, Willie, I'll back ye for a half mutchkin o' bitters," cried a seedy-looking couper in a white hat and glazed waterproof.

"Little to me wud gar my switch fussle roun' yer lugs," continued Willie Futtrit. "Think shame o' yersel' min!"

It was easy, no doubt, for the bleared little coo-couper to vapour away thus as he stood among a group of friendly spectators, mainly of his own genus, who, he knew, would compel the stronger side to keep the peace, if need were. Only, the hour of the day at which these words were uttered was well advanced ; and if blood is thicker than water Willie Futtrit had a sort of natural right to be heard in the matter. Besides, if we keep well in view the canons of taste to which men of his class hold themselves subject, the sentiments uttered may scarcely have been regarded as amounting to a breach of proper manners. By the time that he and Sandy Mutch had slept over the occurrence, it is likely that neither the one nor the other would think of it in any other light than that of a comparatively trifling ebullition such as *will* occur in the intercourse of life. And if nothing worse befel, Sandy's habitual experiences had taught him to treat the sputterings of men of Willie Futtrit's stamp with a considerable measure of indifference, if not to meet them with absolute placidity.

CHAPTER XVI.

WOOD AN' MARRIED AN' A'.

AT last the marriage day came and went with due splendour, and the maiden of the Muirton was conclusively set down as the goodwife of Mill of Meadaple. Of that fact there could now be no doubt. Everything had gone as it had been wished that it should, from the formal and somewhat tedious official performance of the Rev. Dawvid Macdrousie to the conclusion of the whole proceedings, and the felicity of the new goodwife as well as the felicity of the old goodwife, her mother, was complete. And yet not quite complete. The bride had got a dress which in point of style and magnificence outshone everything of the kind that had been known in that region—a costly fawn-coloured silk, with trimmings of lively blue, and headgear to correspond. Within the comparatively narrow circle of the marriage party, the fawn-coloured silk had been duly seen and admired as the maiden assumed her place alongside the manly form of Sandy Mutch, and thereafter took such part as became her position in the general festivities on the occasion; there was no such folly enacted as that of running away on a marriage jaunt. But it was only when “the kirkin’” came on the succeeding Sunday; when Mill of Meadaple and his bride, with the bridesmaids and “young men,” should walk to church in procession, that the glories of the entire bridal drapery would be fully revealed to the general community. The question of a formal “kirkin’” had been fully discussed. It was

not perfectly certain that that ceremony was altogether in accordance with the latest ideas of polite society ; but undeniably "the kirkin'" afforded such opportunity for an impressive display of the bridal furnishings as could not otherwise be equalled. Therefore, the good-wife of the Muirton decided that a formal "kirkin'" there should be with the whole party walking in procession. And no wonder if the bride should exhibit a shade of tremulous anxiety about the effect of this important passage in her life.

The "kirkin'" party was marshalled and set forth from Mill of Meadaple in splendid array, and with an exuberance of animal spirits—as evidenced by the occasional loudness and hilarity of their talk—that in the estimation of some might hardly beseem the character of sober and devout worshippers. But this was merely transient ; and by the time they had got half-way to church, they had calmed down to a somewhat dignified style of behaviour ; inspired thereto, no doubt, by the evident curiosity which the procession had excited in the breasts of the various groups of rustics that they had already encountered. They marched on under a growing feeling of the sensational effect produced on the thickening stream of church-goers, and had just got fairly into the throng of the "kirk fowk," when suddenly there was seen walking steadily on, right in front of them, a small stooping female figure dressed precisely in the style of the bride ; that is, in a fawn-coloured silk dress, trimmed with blue, and other adornments presenting even a startling resemblance to those that set off the bride's person ? Where the figure had come from, or where it was, unseen only a few seconds ago, no one of the bridal party could tell ; only it was there now walking twenty yards in advance, at a pace carefully regulated by theirs, so far as one might judge. They looked at it once, and they looked at it again ; they looked at each other, and the "best young man" checked a half uttered exclamation of

a profane tendency; Sandy Mutch took decidedly red in the face, and Sandy Mutch's bride became decidedly white. Yes, there could be no mistake! It was none else than Jean Futtrit, erstwhile as humdrum in her dress as she was insignificant in personal appearance, dressed in exactly the same material, and the dress made up in exactly the same style as that of the bride, whose place she seemed but a short while ago destined to fill. All the difference was that, along with the finery on the upper part of her person, Jean seemed to have bestowed less attention on the extremities; or it might be a mere matter of habit that made her adhere to the thick-soled home-made shoes, that best beseeemed the disproportionately heavy tramp with which each fall of her foot was accompanied.

The discomfiture of the bridal party was wonderfully complete! When Jean Futtrit turned up in the odd guise of a caricature bride, they were a full half mile from the church, and for that distance they had to march on amid the rapidly increasing body of church-goers with that same figure moving in front, and, in addition to dividing attention with them, giving rise, as they more than surmised, to a goodly amount of quizzical comment and comparison.

In church, too, the unwontedly brilliant appearance of Dykeside's daughter attracted quite as much notice as the spectacle presented by the bridal party, which was by no means inconsiderable; and for that day at any rate, there was reason to fear, the sermon fell but ineffectually on the ears of a goodly proportion of the congregation.

As was natural, the bride and her female friends were annoyed beyond expression at the movement of Jean Futtrit, whom they vehemently denounced as a "smatchet;" while they spoke as if Jean must have committed something like felony to be in a position to present so close a caricature, let us say, of the bridal outfit. The simple explanation of it all was that Jean,

being on intimate terms with the "mantie-makker," had been entrusted in confidence with full particulars concerning the material and "up-mak'" of the bride's dress, and had taken her measures accordingly. The question was what to do now in the matter? Surely it was not to be thought that Jean Futtrit having for once made herself glaringly conspicuous, by appearing at church in a dress so utterly foreign to her usual style would repeat the extravagant incongruity. Next Sunday settled that point; for Jean appeared in her fawn-coloured silk dress as before, and repeated the proceeding of the previous Sunday, in a calm and determined way. She walked before Mill of Meadaple and his wife as they went to church; she sat full in their view in the sacred edifice, and she walked in front of them as they returned home. The new goodwife of Mill of Meadaple, who had simply been angry and excited at first, now quailed as she thought of what might occur. For it was a well-known fact that Jean Futtrit, in her own thrifty way, had been wont to make her superior dresses last, on an average, for a period of seven years; and it seemed only too probable that the fawn-coloured silk, by a long way the most elaborate and costly garment that had ever yet adorned Jean's person, was destined to be the standing eye-sore of her married life for that period of time, if not longer. The thought of being thus be-mocked by the puny but hard-hearted and vulgar little woman was intolerable. And besides all that the question irresistibly came up—Would her position be in any wise bettered were she to forego all further use of her fawn-coloured silk, and replace it by a befitting robe of another style and texture? Just as Jean Futtrit had been shameless enough to flout the decencies of life by arraying herself in the exact *fac-simile* of her bridal dress, might not the wicked creature attempt an equally painful imitation of any other dress she might adopt? So pondered the new-made goodwife of Mill of Meadaple, as day by day passed; and

she failed to see any satisfactory outgate from the dilemma in which she had been so cruelly placed.

When weeks and months had passed the leading theme of gossip was still the same; sufficient reason being that those adversely assailed did not own that amount of self-possession which would enable them to wear an air of indifference, any more than they had that amount of self-respect which would make the appearance of indifference a reality.

“Ay, ay, man; weel that beats a’ green thing. I kent Jean Futtrit was aye a pernicketty, sansheuch kin’ o’ a deemie in ’er nain wye; but aw didna think ’t she wud ’a hed the spunk to dee the like o’ that. No, aw did not.”

“She’s a contermint creatur. Ye wud ken ’t i’ the vera face o’ ’er, wi’ yon lang niz an’ muckle teeth. An’ they said aul’ Dykeside ’er fader, aiven ekeit ’er up till ’t.”

“Dear be here, man. Jist to think o’ the creatur stumpin’ awa to the kirk Sunday aifter Sunday in claise like that, gweed day an’ ill, connachin’ the best o’ braws, forbye makin’ ersel’ a kin’ o’ a moniment to the hail pairis’!”

“Weel, ye ken it’s i’ the naitur o’ some women creaturs to be freely vicious fan ye gi’e them occasion. She’s near-han’ fley’t Mull o’ Meadaple an’ ’s wife oot o’ the kirk—I heard some word o’ them gyaun to the ’piscopals the tither day. An’ brawly does Jean ken ’t, though the goodwife o’ the Muirton preten’s to never lat ’er een see ’er, she’s jist about the weel-warst o’ them a’ wi’ anger an’ spite, an’ cud see *her* neck lithiet wi’ richt gweed wull.”

“An’ she’s keepit at it that gate sin’ they war marriet ye say? Nyod that’s near a towmon syne.”

“It’s jist a towmon gin Feersday come a fortnicht; for aw min’ weel it was the day aifter An’ersmas, an’ I saul’ the broon shalt that day,” said Bowbutts—(it was Bowbutts who was entertaining a former neighbour and

visitor of his own with the chief ongoings of the place since they had last met). "Aw won'er, man, 't ye hedna heard o' 't, for there 's naething ever made sic a sough i' the pairt sin' the aul' goodwife o' Yon'erton was ta'en afore the Bailies for dingin owre the drummer an brakin' 's ribs fan he tried to tak' 'er up for sellin' butter wi' a knyte o' croods i' the hert o' ilka pun' o' 't."

"An' tyeukna Francie nae ither amen's' o' Sandy, no? He mith 'a gotten 'im weel soosh't afore the shirra seerly; or aiven ta'en up to the joodges, for brakin' 's dother's market."

"Weel, he 's a keerious creatur Francie, man. As aw was sayin', it 's commonly thoct that he hed something adee wi' Jean's protticks—futher or no, Francie was unco vyokie aboot it, for aw heard 'im mysel'. It wasna 't he hedna Sandy weel in 's poo'er as maist fowk thoct; nor aiven 't he wasna weel advis't by some o' Mully's ill-willers; but Francie does things his nain gate, ye ken. 'Na, na, man; na, na, man; we ken better foo to dee nor that,' was a' that they cud get oot o' Francie; an it 's said that he 's tried hard several times sinsyne to get a nip o' Sandy i' the market in a quaet wye."

"It 's Willie Futtrit that ees't to be the couper."

"Ou ay, but Francie can mak a kittle aneuch bargain fan he gets the chance. It wud seem that Sandy Mutch is a kin' o' fear't at the bodie aye sin the mairriage; an' Francie kens that as weel. I've heard it said that, rather nor conter 'im or rin the chance o' a hurry wi' 'im, Sandy wud maist face his nain gweed-mither aiven, wi' 'er birse up."

"Ay, man; so Francie Futtrit an' 's dother Jean maun hae the fup han' o' yer neebours gey weel aifter a'."

"An' ye've jist said it, man. They div hae the fup han' o' them the richt gate as far 's that gyangs."

"Foo 's Sandy like to dee upo' yon toon?"

“ N-weel, I cud not say man. Of coorse it’s been an ill sizzon for them ’t hed girse ; an’ they war sayin’ ’t he wud be gey far back ae wye an’ anither ; only that’s i’ the naitur o’ the bizness in a menner, fan ye gae in hail wheel for dealin’ amo’ beasts. But it’s a fawmous toon the Mull o’ Meadaple an’ aiven gin the warst cam to the warst, there’s Muirton an’ the banker ’t wud nae doot contrive to set the couper upo’ the bauks, an’ mak’ a’thing snod an’ ticht atween them.”

No doubt Bowbutts was perfectly right. The working capacity of Sandy Mutch was, as we have seen, a well ascertained quantity ; and if it needed extraneous influence and oversight to make the machine go safely, up to its full power of usefulness, there were reasonably ample grounds for the belief that the men to supply that want effectively were just Muirton and Tammas Rorison the banker.