

AN EXTRAORDINARY SUCCESS.

I.

TAM HENDERSON sat at the top table. It was a Burns supper. The boss, who was in the chair, had invited him. Dining out was not in Tam's line. He was a plumber's foreman, and had little time for diversion. Furthermore, he had a wife. She was pleased about the invitation, however, and had sent Tam's swallowtail to the valet service. She had also persuaded him to clip his moustache. Tam looked uncommonly well.

The supper was an eye-opener. It was the biggest *do* he had ever been at. At an early stage of the proceedings the waiter asked him something about drinks; but Tam failed to catch the drift of the question, so he just nodded his head. It was plain sailing after that. "Gettin' on all right?" said the boss, and Tam replied "Fine!" He was. He cheered every speaker, was the first to shout "Hip! Hip!" after the toasts, wept audibly when the tenor sang "To Mary in Heaven," and joined lustily in "He's a Jolly Good Fellow."

A certain drowsiness came over him about ten o'clock, but he soon got what he called his *second wind*. "He's a boy that!" remarked one of the guests to the boss. The boss winked. At "Auld Lang Syne" Tam, in stooping to lift his hanky, fell. Nothing dismayed, he sat on the floor and beat time to the song, somewhat inaccurately, let it be said, but with great animation.

The boss was going to give him a lift home. Tam

went downstairs to get his coat and hat. The place was very bewildering. He wandered along passages and descended more stairs. Finally he sat down to take his bearings. Then he saw the cloak-room door—right opposite. He knew it at once. He entered.

“Hallo, Paw!” shouted a slut of a girl in a white cap and apron.

“Don’t you Paw me!” he replied savagely.

It was the kitchen. They stopped their dish-washing and formed in a ring round him, laughing hilariously. The chef led him out. After much manœuvring, he reached the street, coated and hatted. The boss had gone. Not a soul was in sight. Not even a policeman. Nothing for it but to walk, or maybe get a night car.

There was a nip in the air. He felt splendid. He started off almost at a running pace.

“Mind your step, old man!” shouted a passer-by.

“Mind your business, young pup!” retorted Tam, accelerating instinctively.

“That’s the stuff to give them,” he said with pride as he shot into George Square. At the corner, the street was up for repair. He jumped the barricade with incredible ease.

II.

There was something odd about everything. He could not understand it. The Square seemed so still and deserted. He rubbed his eyes. Unbelievable but true; there was not even a statue to be seen. The pedestals were there, but all the figures had gone. Remembering that the engineers were on strike, he muttered angrily: “The devils! What’ll they be up to next?”

Some one stood beside him. He felt the presence

rather than saw it. Eventually, from the gloom, he made out the dim shadowy figure of a man, holding in his left hand a top hat. The stranger spoke:

“I expect them back any minute now.”

“Expect wha back?” said Tam.

The stranger was excessively polite. “I am afraid you are not aware that this is Burns’s birthday.” Tam laughed.

“Well,” the stranger continued unperturbed, “it is the custom of my colleagues to celebrate the occasion by what you would call a little spree.”

“Wha are you and your colleagues onywey?” interjected Tam, giving the stranger a dig in the ribs. And then Tam trembled from head to foot. It was not a man he was speaking to; it was a statue, a cold stone statue.

“Compose yourself!” the stranger went on, “there is no need for excitement. A simple matter. We are the statues; it is surely a right and proper thing to do honour to one of our own number. It occurs only once a year—a little visit to the Cross Steeple, some slight liquid refreshment—that is all.”

Tam scratched his head.

“See!” said the stranger, resuming, “there they are coming out at Hanover Street, Burns chaffing Scott as usual about his plaid being on the wrong shoulder.”

“But who are you?” repeated Tam, gaining courage.

“Oh, I’m the North-East corner, Oswald, or something like that, was my name; I share the distinction with the South-East corner of being quite undistinguished. Look now, there you see Lord Clyde and Sir John Moore, arm in arm. The war is their sole topic. They regard it as a complete failure of general-

ship. And there is Thomas Campbell trotting out 'Hohenlinden' to Watt and Livingstone—Hush! here come Victoria and Albert. Their horses seem a bit winded; they must have gone the length of the Green. Poor Victoria! She has never been the same since Gladstone came to the Square. His long speeches always bored her. See that gentleman bringing up the rear? That's Peel, the Minister in attendance, so to speak. Note how the constable salutes him! There's a reason. In my days constables were called *Peelers!* Ha! Ha! But I must go. The midnight hour is striking."

III.

"Hi, you!" It was another voice. A bull's-eye was shining on Tam's face. "D'ye hear me? Come up oot o' that man-hole when I tell you—lying down there like a rat." Tam got to his feet. They pulled him up and propped him against a wall. Looking at his black clothes, sadly besmirched, the constable said: "Guid sakes, is it a weddin' or a funeral ye've been at?"

"A weddin' or a funeral?" Tam repeated, surveying himself. "Maybe ay, and maybe no, but it was an—an—a—nextordinary success."

The constable wiped some blood from Tam's forehead. "You'll better get home out o' this," he said.

"Righto," hiccoughed Tam, and then in a very confidential whisper, "Here, Bobby, get me a taxi and I'll no' say another word about it. I never was a man to keep up ill-will."