

CHAPTER XLII.

SIR SIMON INSTRUCTS DAWVID HADDEN.

WHEN Sir Simon Frissal was about to leave his ancestral seat at Glensnicker for a two months' sojourn in Edinburgh, during the dead of winter, he called for his ground-officer, Dawvid Hadden, to give him such instructions as he considered needful for the guidance of that zealous functionary during his absence. The footman had carried down the message that Sir Simon wished to see him next morning at ten o'clock, and Dawvid manifested his wonted enlarged desire to fulfil his patron's behests.

"Aw'm sayin', 'oman, ye've seerly been lattin that bairns lay tee their han' to my vreetin dask: that'll never do. There's the cork o' the ink-bottle oot; an' aw div not believe but the lid o' the penner's been amo' the aise, an' my vera memorandum book blottit oot o' ken. Ye sud be awaar gin this time that I'm nae responsible to gae afore Sir Simon onhed my papers upo' me."

Dawvid Hadden's wife had heard similar addresses before; and, despite the pleasing haze which connubial fidelity interposes between the wife and her husband in such cases, was able to apprehend, with tolerable distinctness, what it all meant. Dawvid, it was clear, was too well pleased with himself meanwhile to be really angry; so she did not even think it necessary to express regret for the raid made on the dask by the band of junior Haddens, but said, "Weel, man, I canna hae the bairns aye preen't to my tail."

Dawvid got the memorandum book stowed away in his oxter pouch, after duly scanning the more recent part of its contents and gravely adding one or two pencil jottings. Then he started for the appointed interview with Sir Simon Frissal.

"You are quite aware, then, Hadden, of the changes that take place during the ensuing season among tenants?" said Sir Simon.

"They're a' vrote doon here, sir," answered Dawvid, tapping the board of his memorandum book.

"There—What do you mean by that?"

"My book, sir; they're reg'lar enter't."

"H—m. There's a change in the occupation of Gushet-neuk, and a new tenant comes to the wright's croft. Then the old house, occupied as a side school at Smiddyward, is still vacant?"

"They're all here, sir; with the full heids an' particulars," said Dawvid, again tapping the memorandum book.

"That is the only vacant cottage at the hamlet?"

"The only one't can be said to be clean vawcant. There's been nobody there sin' the creatur Peterkin was turn't oot. Hooever, there's only a fairm servan', John Gibb's ploughman, i' the hoose that Widow Will hed—he needna stan' i' the road gif the place be wuntit for anoder."

"I wish you to bear in mind, with respect to the farm and croft, that you will get written instructions hereafter from the factor, Mr. Greenspex, about getting some reliable person to take all necessary measurements of the extent of land in new grass, and other things; but I want you, in the first place, to attend to one or two other matters. Have you seen Birse at Clinkstyle recently?"

"No, sir; but I was hearin', on gweed authority, that he's fairly owre to the non-intrusions noo, as weel's his wife an' daachter. They're proposin' byuldin a hoose for a manse to the Free Kirk minaister chappie."

"Who told you that?"

"It was a vera parteeclear acquaintance't hed it fae some o' themsel's."

"I want you then to ascertain certain particulars without any loss of time."

"I do k-now a good dale already, sir; but nae jist sae authentic maybe as gin it war a maitter o' buzness—but I'm quite awaar hoo I can get first-han' information."

"Taking the house first——"

"I'll jist mak' a' bit memorandum at once," said Dawvid, pulling out his black-lead pencil.

"Put that aside—your memory may serve for once," said Sir Simon, in a tone that made Dawvid look blank. "The labour and expense of putting a fresh roof on this school-cottage and other repairs, were borne, you told me at the time, by John Gibb.—Is that so?"

"Ou, certainly, sir, certainly," answered Dawvid in a perplexed sort of way.

"Well, as it seems very likely the house will be required for occupation again; you'll go and ascertain from Gibb what he would consider an equivalent for his outlay—get it from himself personally."

"Yes, sir. An' wud it need to be shortly?"

"At once. The other matter, about which you have to see Birse, is the march at the lower end of his farm between Clinkstyle and Gushetneuk. The old bauk there is very crooked and runs off from the Clinkstyle side with a long point into the other farm, does it not?"

"You're quite richt, sir," said Dawvid, brightening up at the idea of his topographical knowledge being consulted. "I k-know the spot perfeckly; Clinkstyle's wastmost intoon shift rins in wi' a lang nib, an' a gushetie o' finer lan' there is *not* upo' the place."

"The extent, I am told, is about an acre and a half?"

"Fully that, sir, fully that. I never pat the chyne till 't, but b' guess o' e'e I'm sure it's aboot an awcre an' three reed, forbye the bit o' naitur girss at the burn-side."

"Well, it's very awkward to have a pendicle of that sort belonging to one farm and lying into another—it goes against good husbandry. And now, when a new lease is to

be entered on, I intend to have the march straightened—you will inform Birse of this."

"An' wud ye gi'e 'm an excamb like? I doot he winna be keen about lossin' the grip o' that piece for the same breid farrer up the brae."

"He'll get an equivalent reduction of rent, fixed by competent valuers—tell him so. Mr. Greenspex agrees with myself in holding that the march ought to be straightened, and as Gushetneuk is the smaller farm of the two, it is advantageous otherwise to make the addition to it."

"Weel, sir," said Dawvid, who was beginning to see rather more than he desired of somewhat unpleasant work cut out for him, "I wud hae raither a different idea about the squarin' aff o' that nyeuk——"

"I daresay," answered Sir Simon, drily.

"An' wudna it be better to pit aff for a little, till it cud be gotten mizzour't, afore ye proceedit feenally? I cud——"

"It may be measured as well after as before. Go you to Birse, and tell him my mind, and make sure that you adhere literally to your instructions—tell him the valuation will be fairly made for this acre and a half or two acres that are to be cut off his farm, and put to Gushetneuk, and that he will be allowed a deduction of rent per acre according to valuation."

"Will Mr. Greenspex vrite 'im to that effeck, sir?"

"No; certainly not, at this stage. Attend to what I say—I want you to go first, without loss of time, and inform him of my wish, and get his formal consent. Then Mr. Greenspex will carry out the arrangement. You understand, then, that what you have to do is to ascertain from John Gibb the amount of his outlay on this house, and then to get Birse's consent to cede this bit of ground?"

"Perfectly weel, sir," said Dawvid, in a slightly dubious tone.

"Well, see that you lose no time about it. You may go now. If I've got anything else to say, I'll leave a message for you with Piggles the butler."

There were various thoughts coming and going in the mind of Dawvid Hadden when he left the presence of Sir Simon Frissal, at the close of the interview briefly narrated. He asked himself what in the name of wonder Sir Simon intended to do with Sandy Peterkin's old cottage and school? He did not half relish the idea of going to Johnny Gibb even for the purpose of offering him the prospect of payment for his outlay on these structures. He felt morally certain that Johnny would not omit calling up reminiscences of his, Dawvid's, previous connection with the school buildings, and that not for the purpose of complimenting him on the part he had taken. And then Dawvid saw for the first time that he had committed a strategic mistake when he got Sandy Peterkin turned out, in not also getting his premises levelled with the ground. But the most ticklish business was that of the Clinkstyle march. It is known to the reader how Dawvid contrived to plan a notable addition to the farm of Clinkstyle; how that scheme gained him high favour and repute with Mrs. Birse and her husband; how it disastrously fell through; and how Dawvid had, since that date, fought shy of Clinkstyle, and those who dwelt there. And now here was an imperative command to face Peter Birse—Dawvid would have been glad if he could have felt assured that facing Peter would be all—with a direct proposal not to enlarge, but to curtail, his farm. Dawvid was very keenly alive to all the difficulties and adverse contingencies of the case. He came at once to the conclusion that the hand of Mr. Greenspex was to be traced in it all, and the indignation to which the thought of the lawyer's unwarranted intrusion on what he felt to be his own domain gave rise, afforded a temporary diversion to his feelings. But the reflection soon came up again that in any case, Sir Simon's instructions must be carried out. And because, when he returned to his home, he found his eldest son employed quite harmlessly sketching a flight of crows on the slate on which he used to cast up land-measuring operations, and siclike, he gave the lad a very vigorously laid-on sclaffert on "the side o' the heid."

“Canna ye haud the han’s o’ ye?” said Dawvid. “It’s a keerious thing that creaturs winna keep fae meddlin’ wi’ fat disna lie i’ their gate. Aw think aw wud need-a get every article belangin’ me lockit up fanever aw gae owre the door.”

CHAPTER XLIII.

DAWVID HADDEN CONSULTS THE HENWIFE.

SIR SIMON FRISSAL'S instructions were a subject of engrossing cogitation with Dawvid Hadden, or rather the adverse reception he was likely to meet in carrying them out was so. "But," thought Dawvid with himself, "it's joost fat we maun expeck. There's naebody that's in a public wye need think to please *a'* body. Upo' the tae han' we're nae accountable gin we dinna tak' an order wi' them that's owre-gyaun the laws o' the lan', an fleein' i' the vera face o' Parliament itsel', lat aleen the grytest nobility i' the kwintra; an' syne the best that is canna dee mair nor they may. Sir Simon may prefer the advice o' an Aiberdeen lawvyer, that never tyeuk a squarin' pole in's han', about the layin' oot o' 's lan', to the advice o' them that k-knows the contents o' every feedle upo' the estate, ta'en aff wi' 's nown chyne, but he'll maybe ken i' the lang rin fa's cawpable o' layin' oot a place in a gatefarran wye an' fa's nae."

Thus far of Dawvid's cogitations; but though Dawvid knew perfectly that under a broad and enlightened view it would be found that his sagacity and prudence had been unimpeachable, and his principles of action unassailable, he knew also, that it behoved him to proceed without loss of time to carry out Sir Simon's orders. And he could not get rid of the reflection that the petty details of the thing would, it was more than likely, turn out to be a little

annoying. In the case of Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk, it was true Dawvid had nothing in the shape of unpalatable proposals to make, yet he could not avoid having a slightly uncomfortable feeling at the thought of the explosion that might occur when he took up the subject of the old school-house. However, the offer of an addition to the farm of Gushetneuk could hardly fail, as Dawvid Hadden sought to persuade himself, of mollifying Johnny Gibb's temper, and the happy idea occurred to Dawvid of smoothing his way by playing that card first. And on the whole he felt rather pleased at the prospect in this case. With the Birses of Clinkstyle his task was entirely different. What he had to communicate there would undoubtedly awaken feelings the reverse of pleasant; and in the remembrance of what had occurred so recently in connection with his plan for remodelling the farm of Clinkstyle, Dawvid was to be excused if he did not see clearly how he was to get through the business comfortably. While Dawvid was perplexing himself by turning the question over and over in his mind, he felt a very strong tendency to get confidential on the subject with Meg Raffan. They had had their small encounters; but Dawvid knew that Meg meanwhile was really incensed against her friend, Mrs. Birse, and he somehow felt that her sympathy was worth having.

"Aweel, Dawvid," said Meg, cheerfully, when she had got the ground-officer's gloss on the matter in hand, "we've baith been weel aneuch ta'en in-owre wi' that carline o' a wife o' Clinkstyle; but ye hae the chance o' bein' upsides wi' 'er this time at ony rate. Na, sirs, but she will be in a rampage fan she hears Sir Simon's projeck aboot takin' aff a piece o' their grun. Aw wauger onything she'll come doon upo' aul' Peter's heid aboot it; as gin he cud help it, peer gype. Noo, dinna be mealy mou't, Dawvid, man, fan ye tell them. Aw declare aw wud gi'e my best brodmil o' Mairch chuckens naarhan' to be aside an' hear foo she'll brak oot aboot it wi' that rauchle tongue o' hers."

Dawvid thought within himself that he could forego this coveted opportunity for a slighter consideration than

that mentioned by Meg; yet, under the inspiriting words of the henwife, he felt his courage sensibly rising, as he said, "Ou, weel, I winna flench a hair's braid for nedder man nor 'oman; that's ae thing seer aneuch. I've stan't mony a roch hotter afore noo i' the wye o' duty, as *ye* ken brawly, Meg."

"Weel-a-wat ye never spak' a truer word, Dawvid. Mony's the body that's hed their gullie i' ye aboot yer bits o' transacks; but gin' I war you I sud set up my bonnet a hack fan I gaed owre to Clinkstyle this time."

"Ou, weel, aw'm seer she's been at your merciment as weel's mine, mony a day ere noo," said Dawvid.

"Nae doot aboot it," said Meg. "An fowk hed wuntit to sclave'er throu' the kwintra they wud'a not nae mair nor the wye't she's been gyaun on wi' that peer simple minaster lad to get 'im insnorl't wi' 'er dother. An' fat sud be upo' go noo, but a braw new 'viackle,' 's she was ca'in 't—we sanna say fa till. But it's order't fae the coachmakker's, no—jist bide ye still till the spring day comes in again, gin ye dinna see a braivity at Clinkstyle that hardly beseems fowk 't 's sib to fish cadgers an' siclike! Eh, but she has muckle need o' something to lay the pride o' 'er the richt gate!"

"An' dinna ye min' o' the fools?" interjected Dawvid. "Fat like trag she's sent here owre an' owre again. Awat, she was ill deservin' o' oor leenity for that."

"Ay, but bide ye still, I hae the hank i' my nain han' for that maybe."

"Hae ye gotten this sizzon's hens yet?"

"Feint a feather, no; though the time's lang owre-gane; an' aw was *that* ill aff ere the laird gaed awa' that I hed to fell some bonny yearocks 't aw was keepin', an' 't wud 'a been layin' haill on the feck o' the winter."

"I must see aboot that, though," said Dawvid, in a lofty and half magisterial tone of voice.

"Weel, will ye jist gi'e 'er my remem'rances," added Meg, "an' say't though we canna be but sair obleeg't to them that tak's sic lang pains feedin' the laird's fools, I'm

raelly fley't that they may rin 'er oot o' black dist an' potawto skins? I wud be unco fain to pit my thooms across their craps—an' gin they binna freely at the point o' perfection, I'll sen' them back till 'er for a fortnicht o' her raffy keep wi' the grytest pleesour."

"Weel, Meg, it does raelly set ye to speak," said Dawvid, blythely.

It was after he had been thus instructed and fortified that Dawvid Hadden set out on his important mission of carrying out the orders of Sir Simon Frissal at Gushetneuk and Clinkstyle.

CHAPTER XLIV.

JOHNNY GIBB DISCUSSES THE SITUATION.

To Johnny Gibb, the autumn of 1847 had been a season of varied and engrossing business. There was first the erection of Mr. MacCassock's new manse. So long as the project had remained a matter merely to be talked about and resolved upon, there had been no lack of people to express their ideas and give their advice, but when it had assumed the practical aspect of settling contracts for the building, some of those who had talked most fluently became remarkably vague, and did not seem in haste to commit themselves to any specific action. Johnny Gibb's course was precisely the reverse of this; the erection of the manse was not his proposal, but once it had been resolved upon, Johnny declared that it must be carried out forthwith. "We maun hae the wa's up an' the reef on immedantly, an' lat 'im get marriet, an' win in till 't fan simmer comes roon again." Everybody admitted that this was expedient and desirable, and everybody felt how naturally it fell to Johnny Gibb to push the necessary operations on. And Johnny pushed them accordingly, taking no end of pains in getting materials driven, and kept to the hands of the workmen. Then there were the private arrangements at Gushet-neuk, in view of Johnny Gibb ceasing to be tacksman. The general belief was that Johnny would flit down to the Broch, buy half-a-dozen acres of the unfeued land, and settle down in a sort of permanent attitude as a small laird,

cultivating his own land. Johnny meditated much on the point but said little, until one day, addressing his wife on the question of their future arrangements, he ran over one or two points that had come up to him, and, without indicating any opinion, abruptly finished with the query, "Fat think ye, 'oman?"

"Hoot, man," replied Mrs. Gibb, "fat need ye speer at me? I've toittit about wi' you upo' this place naar foorty year noo, an' never tribbl't my heid the day about fat ye nicht think it richt to dee the morn; an' aw sanna begin to mislippen ye noo at the tail o' the day."

"Weel," said Johnny, with an air of more than his ordinary gravity, "I've been thinkin' 't owre a' up an' doon. It's a queer thing fan ye begin to leuk back owre a' the time byegane. The Apos'le speaks o' the life o' man as a 'vawpour that appeareth for a little, and than vainisheth awa'; an' seerly there cudna be a mair nait'ral resem'lance. Fan we begood the pilget here thegither, wi' three stirks, an' a bran'it coo, 't cam' wi' your providin', the tae side o' the place was ta'en up wi' breem busses an' heather knaps half doon the faul'ies, an' the tither was feckly a quaakin' bog, growin' little but sprots an' rashes. It leuks like yesterday fan we hed the new hooses biggit, an' the grun a' oon'er the pleuch, though that's a gweed therty year syne. I min' as bricht's a paintet pictur' fat like ilka knoblich an' ilka sheugh an' en' rig was."

"An' ye weel may, man, for there's hardly a cannas breid upo' the place but's been lawbour't wi' yer nain han's owre an' owre again to mak' it."

"That's fat aw was comin' till. Takin' 't as it is, there's been grun made oot o' fat wasna grun ava; an' there it is, growin' craps for the eese o' man an' beast—Ou ay, aw ken we've made weel aneuch oot upon't; but it's nae i' the naitur' o' man to gyang on year aifter year plewin, an' del'in', an' earin, an' shearin the bits o' howes an' knowes, seein' the vera yird, obaidient till's care, takin' shape, an' sen'in' up the bonny caller blade in its sizzon, an' aifter that the 'fu' corn i' the ear, as the Scriptur' says, onbeen a kin' o' thirl't to the vera rigs themsel's."

"Weel, a bodie *is* wae tae think o' lea'in' 't."

"Ay, ay; but that's nae a'. Gin fowk war tae leuk at things ae gate we wud be wae to pairt wi' onything 't we hae i' the wardle. But here's oorsel's noo 't's toil't awa' upo' this place fae youth-heid to aul' age, an' wi' the lawbour o' oor nain han's made it's ye may say—Gushetneuk the day's nae mair fat Gushetneuk was fan we cam' here nor my fit's a han' saw. Sir Seemon ca's 'imsel' laird o' 't; but Sir Seemon's deen nae mair to the place nor the man o' France. Noo, you an' me can gae roun' an' roun' about it, an' wi' a' honesty say o' this an' that—'Here's the fruit o' oor lawbour—that'll bide upo' the face o' the earth for the eese o' ithers aifter we're deid an' gane.' Noo, this is fat I canna win at the boddom o' ava. I'm weel seer it was never the arrengement o' Providence that the man that tills the grun an' spen's the strength o' 's days upon 't sud be at the merciment o' a man that never laid a han' till 't, nor hardly wair't a shillin' upon 't, to bid 'im bide or gyang."

"Hoot, man, ye're foryettin seerly 't Sir Seemon gae ye an offer o' the tack yersel', an' that it's ta'en to oor young fowk," said Mrs. Gibb.

"Vera true," answered Johnny. "Sir Seemon, peer man, 's made little o' 't, ae gate nor anither. He's jist as sair in wunt o' siller the day as he was fan the aul' factor gat the first hunner poun' 't ever we scraipit thegither to len' till 'im in a quate wye. But it's nae oorsel's nor Sir Seemon 't aw'm compleenin aboot in particular. It's the general run o' the thing. Fat for sudna lawbourin the rigs in an honest wye for beheef o' the countra at lairge gi'e a man a richt to sit still an' keep the grip, rather nor lat the hail poo'er o' traffikein wi' the grun, for gweed or ill, be left wi' a set o' men that nae only never laid a han' till 't, but maybe never hardly leet their een see 't?"

"Is that the lairds?"

"Ay, ay."

"Eh, but ye ken they gat it fae their forebears."

"An' fat aboot it? Fa gya't to their forebears, aw wud

like to ken? A set o' reivin' sconrels that tyeuk it wi' the strong han', and syne preten't to han' 't doon fae ane till anither, an' buy 't and sell 't wi' lawvvyers' vreetin on a bit sheep's skin. Na, na; there's something clean vrang at the boddom o' 't. We're taul that the 'earth is for the use o' all; the king 'imsel' is served by the field.' The Govern-ment o' the countra sud tak' the thing i' their nain han' an' see richt deen; an' the best teetle to the grun sud be the man's willin'ness to lawbour 't, and grow corn an' cattle for the sustenance o' man."

In this high flight Mrs. Gibb did not attempt to follow Johnny. She merely smiled and said, "Weel, aw'm seer, man, ye div tak' unco notions i' yer heid. Hairry Muggart wud be naething to ye for a politician."

"Ou, weel, aw daursay Hairry wudna differ wi' me aboot that. But that's nedder here nor there. Fowk canna mak' owre seer that there's a richt an' a vrang in a' thing; an' lang eesage 'll never gar oonjustice be richt nae mair nor it 'll mak' black fite, say fat they like. Only we wus speakin' aboot oor nain sma' affair—I div not think that there would be muckle thrift in you an' me gyaun awa' buyin' a twa three rigs o' grun' an' sittin' doon wi' a' thing, unco aboot's to fecht upon 't for a fyow years. Fan ance fowk's at oor time o' life they sud be willin' to lat the theets slack a bit; an' gin they've ta'en up their yokin' straucht an' fair, they can leuk back wi' a kin' o' contentment upo' the wark that's deen, min'in' a' the time that ithers sud be layin' their shooders to the draucht, raither nor themsel's hingin' i' the heid o' things as gin this wardle wud laist only as lang as they keepit fit wi' 't. Noo, I'm fell sweer to think o' a cheenge fae this place, an' I'll tell ye foo."

"Loshtie man, ye're seerly gyaun gyte——"

"Na, na. I see fat ye're ettlin at. I'm nae foryettin 't the place is set to the young fowk, 's ye ca' them; nedder wud I want to stan' i' their road a single hair's-breid, nor to meddle wi' them ae gate nor anither. For ance *they're* waddit *we're* supperannat, that's a doonlaid rowle. But

there sudna be nae gryte diffeekwalty aboot gettin' hoose-room for twa aul' fowk. The hoose is a byous size for len'th; an' yer neebour 'oman, ye ken, 's taul ye a dizzen o' times owre that it wud be a spawcious hoose for a genteel faimily gin it hed a back kitchie wi' a lang chimley biggit. It winna be in oor day that Willy M'Aul an' the lassie 'll be so far up b' cairts as be needin' a castell to haud their braw company, an' wi' little contrivance an' nae muckle biggin' we mith get a snod aneuch beil' by partitionin' aff the wast en' an' makin' a sin'ry door to oorsel's."

"Weel, fa wud 'a minet upo' that but yersel', noo?" exclaimed Mrs. Gibb, lost in admiration of her husband's inventive genius. She was not in the habit of ever seriously disputing his will, yet Johnny was evidently gratified to find that his project was not merely acceptable to Mrs. Gibb, but that the prospect it opened up, as the good woman phrased it, "liftit a birn aff o' her min'," and would, she was sure, be welcomed by all concerned.

"Weel, we 'll see," said Johnny; "we maun jist a' leern to ken that the wardle can dee wuntin's. We a' get oor day, an' oor day's wark; the time slips by like the mist creepin' seelently up the howe. 'What thy hand findeth to do, do with thy might,' is the lesson we ocht aye to bear in min', though we af'en, af'en foryet it; an' fan we leuk back fae a point like this o' the lang track o' years strecthin into the saft mornin' licht o' oor days, an' a' croon't wi' blessin's, it's like a dream, but a pleasant dream tee, an' foreshaidowin' a better time to come to them that's faithfu' to their trust. But, ye ken, an aul' tree disna seen tak' reet again, nor yet haud the grun weel fan it's liftit. An' aw 'm thinkin' gin they're to get ony mair gweed o' me, they 'll hae maist chance o' 't by lattin' 's stick faur we are. An' though Sir Seemon may ca' the rigs o' Gushetneuk his, I'm maistly seer, gin the rigs themsel's cud speak, they wud ca' me maister raither nor him. But it mak's na muckle back or fore. They 'll be mine to the sicht o' my een maybe as lang's I'm able to see the sproutin' blade or the yalla corn sheaf; an' Sir Seemon's lairdskip canna gie 'im mair."

I think Johnny Gibb had about finished his moralising, but he had scarcely ceased speaking when the lassie, Mary Howie, opened the room door, in which Johnny and Mrs. Gibb had been seated all the while, and, under the impression apparently that she had interrupted their conference, asked, "Was ye speakin', uncle?"

"Ou ay, lassie, but never heed. Fat was ye needin'?" asked Johnny.

"Naething," said Mary, with a comical side glance toward her aunt. "It's only Dawvid Hadden that's wuntin to speak to ye."

"Faur is he?" asked Johnny, with a hard, abrupt sort of snap that contrasted very oddly with his previous tone of voice.

"Oh, he's at the door, but he canna come in on nae accoont; he's in a hurry—he has 'more calls to mak'."

Johnny Gibb rose with a kind of half grunt, and went away toward the door to speak with Dawvid Hadden.

CHAPTER XLV.

DAWVID HADDEN MAKES TWO BUSINESS CALLS.

"THERE's a fine nicht, Maister Gibb," said Dawvid Hadden, in a tone of much affability, on Johnny Gibb showing himself at the door of the house of Gushetneuk at the time already mentioned. "No—aw canna bide to come in. I've forder to gae, ye see. Aw was jist wuntin a fyou minutes' discorse on a maitter o' buzness."

"Weel, ye'll jist sit as chaep's stan'," said Johnny, sententiously. "But please yersel'."

"A—y," exclaimed Dawvid, with a prolonged sound, and searching his breast pocket deep down. "That's vera keerious. Aw thocht aw hed a' my material here. Hooever, ye can maybe gi'e's pen an' ink gin we requar't—an' as ye say, Maister Gibb, we'll sit as chaep's stan'."

With this Dawvid went inside without more ado. After graciously saluting Mrs. Gibb, and making some further demonstrations in the way of professing to produce papers, Dawvid said—

"Weel, I joost cam' owre bye as seen's aw cud get some oder things arreeng't aifter Sir Simon leeft, to forquant ye that we had resolv't to straucht the mairch atween you an' Clinkstyle, clippin aff that lang heugh an' the bit burnside fae him, an' pittin't tee to Gushetneuk. There's jist—lat me see, I hae't here till an ell—twa awcre an' about half a reed—It's prime intoon grun, ye ken."

Dawvid had not been so definite about the measurement

with Sir Simon ; but it would not do to indicate weakness on that point to a mere tenant. He would have gone on to descant on the advantages that would accrue to the farmer of Gushetneuk from the proposed addition, but at this stage, Johnny Gibb, who had been a little taciturn hitherto, broke in—

“An’ ye’re nae tir’t yet meddlin’ wi’ fat ye ca’ the layin’ oot o’ fowk’s grun? I thocht ye hed gotten aboot as muckle, short syne, as wud ’a sair’t maist fowk at that trade. Hooever, it maksna futher ye be leein’ or tellin’ the trowth this time ; a’ that I hae to say is, that I’m nae tacksman langer nor the term, an’ hae naething adee wi’ t. An’ I’se only tell ye that ye mith be a hantle better employ’t nor makin’ dispeace amo’ neebour fowk—feint ane ’ll thank ye for cheengin the mairch.”

Dawvid evidently had not expected this style of retort. He was put out accordingly, and only managed to blurt out—

“It’s Sir Simon’s enstruptions to me at ony rate.”

“Maybe,” said Johnny, curtly. “We’ve heard fowk speak o’ ‘Sir Seemon’s enstruptions’ lang ere noo, fan Sir Seemon beheev’t to be haud’n on the ill gate that he was gyaun b’ them that ackit the pairt o’ mere seecophants till ’im, or tyeuk a pride in rinnin Sawtan’s erran’s onbidden.”

“Weel, Maister Gibb,” said Dawvid, with a forced attempt at hilarity, “we sanna cast oot aboot aul’ scores ; fowk sudna keep up um’rage aifter things is ance past, ye ken. Sir Simon’s mair o’ a gentleman——”

“It’s nae Sir Seemon’t we’re speakin’ aboot eenoo,” interjected Johnny, abruptly.

“Weel, Gushets, I’m only Sir Seemon’s—servan’,” pursued Dawvid, in a nonplussed sort of way.

“I’m weel awaar o’ that ; an’ gin ye hed been aye content to dee an honest servan’s pairt ye wud ’a been a muckle mair respeckit man nor ye are this day.”

Whether it was in accordance with proper etiquette in Johnny Gibb to invite Dawvid Hadden into his house, and then heckle him after this fashion, I shall not pretend to say ; but of this I am certain, that the proceeding was in entire accordance with the whole tenor of Johnny’s general

procedure, and could not be construed into anything of the nature of intentional rudeness. That it was rudeness at all could be admitted only on the principle that it is rude in a man to utter his honest opinion in plain words. Anyhow, the collapse on Dawvid Hadden's part was somewhat marked. Fairly dismounted from his high horse, he found refuge for once in the literal truth.

"I'm nae here o' wull, I'se asseer ye; but to cairry oot Sir Simon's doon-laid orders. He wuntit to ken immed-antly fat was aughtin you for fat ye laid oot upo' that—place at the Ward."

"Fat place? The skweel? Little won'er nor ye think shame to mak' mention o' 't, man. Haud'n you an' the like o' ye awa', it mith 'a been a blessin' to the pairt at this day, an' for generations to come. Tell Sir Seemon that it stan's there the reproach o' 's estate, an' 'll rise up in jeedgment yet against them 't has the swick o' makin' 't a desolation."

"I must go, ony wye," said Dawvid, rising to his feet, and taking out his memorandum book. "Will ye obleege b' jist gi'en's the figure o' fat ye laid oot on 't?"

"I nedder can nor wull," replied Johnny, in a decisive tone. "Fan ye carriet things 's ye did, the black gate, that 's a sma' affair, an' the tow may gae wi' the bucket. It 'll be time aneuch to speak o' that fan anither tenan' comes till 't."

"There 'll be no oder tenan' there; it 'll be knockit doon; but Sir Simon wunts to vrang no man o' 's money—ye better mention a soom."

"I 'll dee naething o' the kin'. Gin ye gi'e Sir Seemon a true accoont o' fat I've said to ye this minit, I'se be content."

When Dawvid Hadden had left Gushetneuk, and had got time to glance calmly at the situation, the temper of mind in which he found himself was the reverse of amiable. He had an uncomfortable impression that the representative of law and authority had after all come off not exactly first best in the interview that had just ended, and then what was he to report to Sir Simon? That Johnny Gibb had snubbed him, and sent him away without any proper answer to the

inquiry that had brought him there? Dawvid felt irritated in a high degree; and I daresay there was a certain advantage in this, after all, for as he toddled across the fields towards Clinkstyle, the feeling of irritation merged into a sort of savage resolution to march right on, and fearlessly beard the Birses in their own den. This thought carried Dawvid on rather briskly for a space; yet I think he was on the whole somewhat relieved mentally when he suddenly stumbled upon Peter Birse senior stalking along the end rig of one of his fields, at the distance of nearly a couple of hundred yards from the steading. Dawvid strode firmly up to Peter, with the intention of at once announcing Sir Simon's proposal, and securing Clinkstyle's assent to it.

"There's a mochie nicht, Clinkies," said Dawvid, gravely.

"A mochie nicht, Dawvid," answered Peter, in an uncertain kind of tone.

"I've gotten a bit dockiment here to get yer percurrence till, than," continued Dawvid, thrusting his hand into his pocket.

"I houpe it's nae neen o' that duty papers—aboot rinnin horse, coach kin' o' viackles, nor naething?" asked Peter Birse, uneasily.

"No, no," said Dawvid. "I dinna interfere wi' fat's nae buzness o' mine.—I've to do only wi' the lan'. Sir Simon's resolv't to rectify the booundary atween you an' Gushetneuk. Leuk here (and he pointed down the brae), takin' a swype clean doon fae that bit elbuck at the back o' your infeedle, to the burn side, an' cuttin' aff twa awere odds o' the lang point."

"Nae the ootwuth nyeuk o' fat we ca' the Pardes park—we hinna grun like it upo' the place?"

"That's the spot," said Dawvid, decisively.

"An' fat wud he be gi'ein's b' wye o' excamb like?"

"Nothing, nothing," said Dawvid. "Ov coorse there'll be an allooance ta'en aff o' the rent fan we get it calculat."

"Man, that's sair," exclaimed Peter Birse, in a pitiful voice.

"Weel, it's not my arreangement, ye k-now," said Dawvid Hadden, "but that's fat I've to get yer consent till. So

ye'll better jist say that ye're agreeable at ance, an' nae deteen me nae langer."

"Na—na ; aw cudna dee't upon nae accoont," and Peter began to move away as he spoke. "Ye wud need to come in aboot to the toon at ony rate, Dawvid, man, afore we cud speak about onything o' the kin'."

"Oh, I've nothing ado gaen to yer toon," said Dawvid, as he slowly followed his retreating interlocutor. "It's you that I hae to saddle wi' as fairmer o' the place, that's the short an' the lang o' 't.—Fat am I to say to Sir Simon, than?" added Dawvid, in a louder and more imperious tone.

"She's jist at han' ; it winna hin'er ye nae time," replied Peter, moving on rather faster than before.

Dawvid Hadden knew perfectly well what it all meant ; only if Mrs. Birse had to be faced—why he was just the man to do it. "It's a keerious thing," said Dawvid, "that some fowk cudna ca' the niz o' their face their nain without speerin leave."

To this sarcasm Peter Birse made no reply.

Mrs. Birse had happily observed the approach of her husband and Dawvid Hadden from the parlour window, and it was but the work of a moment to call her servant maid and say, "Gae to the door there, an' gar yer maister tak' that—person—to the kitchie !"

It was in the kitchie, then, that the present interview between Dawvid Hadden and Mrs. Birse took place. When the lady was sent for she sailed majestically ben to that apartment, took her stand near the door, and with a becoming toss of the head, uttered the monosyllable "Weel?"

Dawvid Hadden had succeeded this time in restraining his impulse to mention the state of the weather ; and in so doing, left himself barren of a topic for the moment.

"Noo, ye better jist say awa', Dawvid, an' tell *her* fat ye was speakin' aboot," remarked Peter Birse.

With a sort of bravado air, Dawvid then repeated Sir Simon's proposed "rectification of the frontier" of Clinkstyle.

"Onything mair, no?" asked Mrs. Birse, with a look that would like enough have withered Dawvid, had that process

not been pretty effectively performed on his hard skinny person previously. "Ye're seerly owre modest the nicht i' yer thiggin!"

"Gin there's onything mair ye'll lickly hear o't in 't's nain time," answered Dawvid, sharply. "Lat the thing that we cam' here aboot be sattl't i' the first place."

"Indeed! I sud think I ken my place better nor be forespoken by ony oon'er—servan'—at ony rate."

"I dinna k-now fa ye refar till," said Dawvid; "but gin ye gae muckle forder a-len'th ye'll maybe gar me lowse o' ye the richt gate; that's a'."

"Noo—noo, dinna come to heich words, sirs," interposed Peter Birse.

"I'm only wuntin a plain, ceevil answer till a vera legible question to tak' back to my maister," continued Dawvid, "an' that I'll hae."

"My compliments to yer maister, than," said Mrs. Birse, "an' tell him that there's people that k-knows their richts, an' foo far the law o' the lan' 'll cairry him or the like o' 'im; or than the best lawyers in Aiberdeen 'll be sair mista'en. We're nae at that yet that we're needin' to be trampit upon aiven b' them that ca' themsel's nobility."

Having uttered this speech, Mrs. Birse turned and sailed away to the parlour again in even a more stately style than before. Dawvid, who had just been getting up steam, and who felt that, with the hints afforded him by Meg Raffan, he would speedily get into good trim for sustaining a continued onset with Mrs. Birse, was thus suddenly left high and dry, with only Peter Birse senior in a powerless, half-frightened state before him. He could get no approach to a definite reply, of course, from Peter, who was able only in a faint way to deplore and deprecate a rupture with the laird, which seemed so imminent. And Dawvid departed with the terrible threat to Peter Birse senior, "Weel, weel, ye'll jist hae to stan' the consequences," but otherwise little enough satisfied with the results of his visit, and slightly at a loss as to the terms in which he was to report to Sir Simon.

It was in vain that Dawvid Hadden, on his way home, bothered his brains to devise a mode of avoiding Meg Raffan till the events of his afternoon's journey should be stale news, or at least until he had fully collected his thoughts on the subject. What mattered it that he stole quietly up to his house through the old fir-trees, so as to steer clear of the Lodge where Meg dwelt? He had barely been five minutes under his own roof when Meg, with leisurely step, entered, conscious of her right on this occasion to get the news in full tale. And Dawvid, when fairly put to it, gave a narrative, the distinguishing characteristic of which, as Meg Raffan herself would have expressed it, was the disposition indicated to "mak' a' face that wud be face."

"H—m, weel, Gushets was fell nabal at the ootset—mair sae nor ye wud 'a leukit for, aw daursay. But i' the lang rin, aifter I hed latt'n 'im get oot's breath a bittie, he cam' tee won'erfu'; an' fan I cam' to the prencipal thing—fat was yawin 'im for the reef o' the skweel, he ackit like a gentleman. 'Naething, Dawvid,' says he, 'naething; mak' yer best o' t.' Nothing, cud be mair rizzonable in a menner nor that.—Na, 's ye say, 't's nae lang till Gushets gi'e ye edder alms or answer. Ou, weel, Birse was jist like 'imsel'. I hed hardly apen't my mou' till 'im, fan we for-gedder't at the fit o' the loan, till he was hingin' 's lugs like ony supplicant. To the hoose he wud be, an' to the hoose he gaed. No, no, it was i' the kitchie 't I saw 'er—I wasna wuntin naar their parlour, I 'se asseer ye. Weel, gin she wasna ensolent, my name 's nae Dawvid Hadden. Hooever, 't's Sir Simon 't she 'll hae to be answerable till for that. But gin I didna grip 'er in aboot, I did naething to the purpose, that 's a'. Aw b'lieve she socht na lang o' my company, at ony rate."

Meg's advice to Dawvid was to report very adversely of the Birses to Sir Simon Frissal, and Dawvid was nothing loth, merely adding the remark that of course one could not give so full and effective a narrative as might be wished in a "vrutten dockiment."