

A NIPPY TONGUE

IT was Sabbath morning I made for Betty Reid's abode, where I was sure to find the old invalided woman cushioned high in an arm-chair and drawn near the little window, from which coign of vantage she could watch and comment upon the different passers-by, as they wended their way along the street to the forenoon service. "Ay, imphin; whae're thae gaun up the far side, Meg?—That's, let me see—that's Leezie Wulson and her man.—Humph, Leezie Wulson is it—weel, aith, an' ye wud think to see them gaun cancin' along the street cheek by jowl that they were aye the best o' freens, an' Nancy Murray, wha leeves but-an'-ben wi' them tells me—an' mind ye, that juist yince removed—that they sometimes kick up the very deevil. Ay, it's no' easy judgin' fowk by their Sunday behavior.—Is that a beuk Leezie hes i' her haun'?—Ay, says Meg, it's a new yin too.—Ise warrant it's new an' faceable noo, or she wudna haud it up sae heigh. An' Tam'll hae an umberellie i' his haun'. They tell me he never thinks he's richt snod without an umberellie. Hairmless body, Tam. I'm aye wae for him, wi' a tinkler o' a wife like Leezie.—Is that Jess Wabster crossing the syre.—No, that's Heughsie Williamson, an' she's had her Paisley shawl weshen. It's braw an' clean.—Ay,

weel, if her shawl's clean, I'll wager her kitchen flae's no'. Awfu' hudder, Heughsie, an' aye was—so was her mither. It rins i' the blid—like wudden legs.—An' there's Geordie Muncey—Greetin' Geordie we aye caa'd him. There's never onything gangs richt wi' him. He's aye lookin' oot for troubles and worries, an' he's no' aftin disappointed. His soo dee't wi' some queer complaint that baffled Fletcher a month come Monday; and his wife, they tell me, had twins last Tuesday. Nae wunner he's forfouchten lookin'.—Guidsake, whae's that i' the middle o' the road—I do declare it's Nancy Rae frae Carronbrig. Thae Carronbrig fowk are deevils—an—a' to gang to the kirk. Nocht keeps them back—wund nor water. But Nancy's no' wise to come oot sae sune. Sic a trauchle she maun hae—a feckless, no-weel man, eleven weans, an' the youngest o' them no' a month auld. Faith, an' they'll be a' tummlin' ower yin anither like collie puppies. Nancy's mither was an awfu' tairger—Bet Black was her name. She cam' frae the wast country, was three times mairret, an' dee'd o' drink—I mind when she—preserve us a', wha's the smirkin' pair that gaed by the noo? Mighty me, lookit straucht in—to see that her bonnet was sittin' richt, nae doot.—Whae were they, Meg?”

Meg had caught a glisk of them as they passed, and was in a position to satisfy her aunt's curiosity. “It's Davie Tamson and his wife. They're to be kirked the day.”

“Imphin, lovan ay, noo—of course, imphin. He mairret Bell Grier's dochter, didn't he?—Ay, Leib, the second auldest. She was a dressmaker in Dumfries.—Aye; just so, imphin. Puir Davie, simple soul, worrit a whalp. As for her—I dinna ken what kinna worker she'll be, but they tell me she's a capital guid dancer.”

“There's Tam Hotson's dochter gaun across the syre,” says Meg. “That's her last year's bonnet

tished up a bit. There's a feather at the back noo, whaur there was a flo'er afore."

"Rax me ma lang-sichted specks, Meg."

"Faigs, Aunt, I dinna think ye need ony better specks; ye're seein' brawly."

"Nae havers noo, Meg, gie's ma specks.—Weel, weel, there goes Aggie Crosbie wi' her heid i' the air like a cat wi' a herrin'—a leebral supporter o' the kirk, they tell me, an' she hungers her bit servant lassie. Sic on-gauns, Prood naebody!—What was she afore she mairret Robbie Crosbie? I min' o' her when she had neither buits or shoon to her feet. She never wud learn at the schule. She's nae notion o' ony warld ootside the hills roon' about, and thinks Ameriky's awa somewhere ayont the quarry.—Ay, just so, Wattie Semple, there ye go. Aith, an' ye're no' a beauty. I really think ye're the warst faur'd man in a' Thornhill."

"He canna help that," ventured Meg mildly.

"No, deed no, we mauna ca' the Almighty's wark in question. A' the same, Wattie micht aye stay about hame." The passing throng of worshippers became denser, and for a time it was difficult to particularise. Betty meanwhile lay back in the chair, and at times crooned snatches of an old Psalm tune.

"There's young Tammas Hairstanes hame frae Lunnon, an' a wise-like chiel he is," says Meg, after a pause.

"Whae say ye, Meg?" Betty asked excitedly.

"Tammas Hairstanes—auld Tammas Hairstanes' grandson. That's him fornent Suffie Boyes' door."

Betty had staggered to her feet—"Ay, that's a Hairstanes, every inch o' him—a grandson' o' Tammas Hairstanes—my Tammas—My Tammas that was." Then she looked vacantly round her little kitchen, and after a pause asked Meg to sit down beside her. Quietly she sat with Meg's hand in hers. "It's sixty years sin' my auld hert has been touched

as it has been the noo. I thocht a' thae years that I had leev'd it doon, but there's a corner there yet. Ay, it's a lang time tae look back on, an' it's been a dreary life for me. But it was a' my ain daein' an' the Lord's will. Nae man o' ony spunk can staun to be slichted, an' I slichted Tammas Hairstanes. It was the nicht o' a Langmire Kirn, an' Tammas had danced twice rinnin' wi' Marget Brydon. When he cam' to tak' me hame I tel't him to gang away wi' Marget. Dear me, I mind his words to this day—'Hoots, Betty, lass—Marget Brydon's no' worth a thocht, and you are a' the world to me.' Pride an' jealousy stept in atween us, an' my dream was at an end. I could hae lipped my life i' his keepin'. Ay, it a' comes back frae the past, an' the memory as time gangs by comes a' the clearer."

JOSEPH LAING WAUGH.

From "Thornhill and its Worthies,"

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