

WILLIE WEEDRAP'S DOMESTIC ASTRONOMY.

WILLIE WEEDRAP was a clog-maker in the Sautmarket o Gleska. He was of a highly scientific turn of mind, and was fond of astronomy, and—a dram.

He was a much married man, Willie, but took humorous views of life—married life included—and honestly tried on all occasions to treat domestic differences as he did auld clogs, that is—to speedily mend them.

His wife Betty had a temper as keen as a bit of Sheffield cutlery, and domestic rows were commonly frequent, and not uncommonly high-pitched.

Willie, however, patiently wrocht awa', accepting his fate as a thing that wadna wash oot, like the cross on the cuddy's back. Willie was domestically doon-in-the-mooth a bit;

but there were waur things in life than a nettlesome wife, an' that was—nae wife ava'!

But although only a clog-maker to trade, Willie had a soul in his breast, and nursed in his leisure moments aspirations above leather, and cultivated spheres of thought vastly beyond the circumscribed radius of mere cluggs.

He went boldly in for the study of astronomy assisted by observations taken through an Eighteen-Penny Spy-Glass, and could tell his wondering cronies and customers all about the theory of the planetary system, including the mountains in the moon, and the composition of the sun.

His wife, Betty, however, gave him no encouragement whatever in his moonstruck studies, but rather sat on him as often as he offered to trot out his astronomical craze.

"Leather and science! cluggs an' star studies!" she would contemptuously exclaim; "a fine mixture atweel! Talk about comets' tails, an' sic like; dowgs' tails wad serve ye better, Willie, pittin' aside for the moment the question o' guid clugg leather!"

"Weel, maybe, Betty, maybe; but if ye think I'm to be tied doon to a dowg's tail a' my days, jist like an' auld tincan, ye're labourin' under a gross mistake, my dear woman; for let me tell ye, yince for a', that I've a soul greatly above dowgs' tails, tanned leather, an' clugg-heels—a soul that rises to the very heavens on the wings o' knowledge; while you—you—you, Betty, were formed by Nature to wear your puddin' head in a mutch, an' plowter awa' a' your days wi' a washin'-cloot, a hearth-broom, an' a black-lead brush!"

After some such lofty tirade as this, Willie, knowing his wife's Sheffield-cutlery temper, would invariably make for the door, and would disappear from the fireside for the rest of the evening, to smoke a pipe an' talk astronomy with a friend over a social gill in the back-room of one of the too numerous local "pubs."

The social dram, indeed, was honest Willie's weak bit—the one vulnerable point in his moral armour which rendered Betty's persecution of him possible, and, so far, justifiable.

Willie, however, stoutly denied the charge of intemperance at all points, declaring that it was Betty's cutting temper that was in the blame, and that a canny, nerve-steadying dram was his only available solace and antidote. And thereby often hung a tale.

Well, one night shortly since, Willie was at a social merry-making in an auld frien's house, the occasion being that of a brother clog-maker's marriage to a third wife—a buxom widow of forty-five summers, who owned an oyster-shop in the Gallowgate.

Willie's wife would not accompany him, "no' having a wise-like bonnet to pit on her heid," as she declared, though Willie saw little wrang wi't; so our hero took the road himself, weighted to the moral scupper-holes with strict injunctions to "mind and be light on the dram," and to be "sure an' be hame by the ring o' ten."

"A' richt, Betty, my dear," assented Willie, "a' richt I'll no' jist say I'll come strecht hame, as I'm a wee boo'd in the back, ye ken, but I'll dae my level best, Betty—I'll dae my level best."

Once outside his own door, Willie dismissed his wife's injunctions as just so much useless back-balance, and once among his friends and fellow-tradesmen, he was merry in the extreme.

It was eight o'clock in the evening when the marriage party assembled, and, long before the hour of ten, song and sentiment were going the round of the room to the merry squeak of a fiddle.

Willie had sung three times, and now his turn had come round once more, and everybody was impatiently applauding his expected fourth "go"; so, under the inspiration of his seventh glass, our hero rose and said:—

“Ladies and gentlemen,—My next song will be a lecture, an’ the subject o’ my discourse will be

DOMESTIC ASTRONOMY.

Domestic astronomy is yin o’ the grandest o’ the sciences, an’ bate’s cock-fechtin’ a’ to sticks. (Hear, hear.) It’s a remote theme ; but the application of its grand and lofty principles to domestic matters is worthy the attention o’ every workin’-man wha values harmonic peace and quateness at his ain fireside. Courtship and marriage are baith illustrated in its magnificent laws. (Sensation, and considerable rubbing of specks, and a voice—‘The dram’s tooken Willie’s pow.’) In the first place, as the ministers say, the uncertain course o’ love has its counterpart in the laws o’ attraction an’ repulsion that govern the stellar worlds. There is gravitation, or the mutual attraction o’ twa opposite bodies, an’ that’s courtship. (Laughter and applause.) Then, secondly, there’s a law o’ repulsion in nature, an’ that’s exemplified in the rejected-lover tragedy. (Hear, hear, and laughter.) Thirdly, there are over-ruling laws o’ harmonious concord an’ sweet amity in nature, an’ that’s married life—wi’ a hook ! (Loud laughter, in the midst of which the lecturer was seen to stick his two thumbs in his vest pockets, and play suggestive piano-notes with his remaining fingers, accompanied by a sustained wink of the left eye.) Furthermore, the heid of the hoose may be fitly likened to the parent sun, the grand centre o’ the fireside starry system, an’ the bairns the wee planets that revolve aroond him, receiving frae him their light, their life, an’ their heat. (Applause, and a voice—‘An’ the wife, Willie, what about her ? Is she the mune, or what?’) Oh, the wife, the wife!—let me see ; she’s a—she’s a—she’s a—a—a disturbin’ comet that wad been better left oot o’ the programme a’ thegither. (Loud laughter from the spectacled husbands, and groans from the married wives all round.) Then, gentlemen, if your mind is harassed wi’ care or domestic differences, the contempla-

tion o' the grand starry worlds, aided by a guid-gaun pipe, soothes the troubled mind, as a linseed poultice daes a sair finger. Man, proud man, looks wee in comparison wi' the starry universe; an' woman—wee'r! (Hear, hear, from the married men.) Then, fourthly, there's the unknown composition o' the sun. (A voice—'Ay, that's a fizzer! What's it like, Willie?') It's like the composition o' a woman's mind—mystery, contradiction, and incomprehensibility. (Angry protestations from the married wives, and laughter all round.) But maybe, gentlemen, after a', like the sun himsel', we couldna dae vera weel without the women folks. It's a ticklish question, an' I'll leave every married man to decide it for himsel'. (Hear, hear, and ironical cheers.) Weel, to cairry on the analogy a bit farrer, there's, in conclusion, the November meteors—the 'shooting stars, as they're commonly ca'd. Noo, what possible domestic use, think ye, can they be applied to? (A voice—'Kitchen coals.') Better than that. Noo listen, married men, for what I'm gaun to say vitally affects your interests an' domestic peace o' mind. It's said that nae less than fowr hunder an' fifty thoosand meteoric stanes fa' frae the heavens an' strike this earth every day during the year. Noo, it stan's to reason that if oor wives were instructed in elementary astronomy, then, when a fellow cam' hame frae a spree, wi' a wee drap in his e'e, alang wi' a cut heid an' a badly-damaged hat, an' tell't his flytin' wife that he was struck by a meteor, she wad certainly believe him. There's no a doubt o't. (Hear, hear, and laughter.) But apairt frae an' above a' mere theoretical applications, the study o' astronomy is the best domestic salve an' comfort a man can have, for it tak's him oot o' himsel', an' enables him to fling aff, as he wad his topcoat, a' petty annoyances—including the taxes, the rent-day, and the Sheffield-cutlery temper of a nettlesome wife." (Loud and continued applause, during which the ingenious lecturer resumed his seat.)

Willie's amusing lecture was pronounced the event of the evening, and thereafter the general fun went so very merrily, that it was well on for the "wee short hour ayont the twal'" before he thought of rising.

And when at last he did take the road for home, he was in a state of elevation nearly equal to that of the shining stars overhead.

But great as was our hero's mental elevation, he could not rise above the dread of his wife Betty, who he had good reason to fear was waiting for his return, armed with a sentiment of just wrath, a tattie-beetle in her right-hand, and a Sheffield-cutlery lecture, twa yards in length, on the neb o' her stinging tongue.

"O! Willie, Willie!" he muttered to himself, as he stotted hame, "what'll your wife Betty say to you this nicht when ye set fit inside your ain door? Ten by the ring o' the clock was to see ye hame, and there's the toon-bells ringing twa o' the mornin'! Gosh, but I'll cop't frae the wife this nicht, as sure as clugg-heels are airn. Talk about astronomy! It'll be tangs-an'-poker-onomy for me when I reach hame, I fear. Ow! what's that—what's gane wrang?"

This latter exclamation was forcibly expelled from our hero by a pitch-in he had with something stiff, straight, and unyielding as a stone-wall.

He looked up stupefied for the moment, and saw that he had collided with a lamp-post.

He felt his head, and it *felt* bad. He had looked at his felt hat, and it both *looked* and *felt* bad.

"My heid's naething—it'll mend in a day or twa," he muttered to himself, considerably sobered by the collision. "But what'll Betty say to my staved-in hat? And it a split-new yin tae! But stop! I have it! I'll apply the principles o' my ain lecture on domestic astronomy, an' tell her I was struck by a falling meteor. If she disna believe it, assisted by the evidence o' her ain twa ecn, as exemplified

in my cut broo and my badly-damaged hat, she nicht dae't, that's a' I'll say."

Thus resolved, our hero stotted on, laughing up his sleeve at the device he had so ingeniously resolved on adopting, hoping and mentally praying for its success.

In a few minutes, rap-tap, tirr-rap! went his knuckles on the door, and presently his angry better-half appeared at the door, a nicht-mutch on her head, and wrath written in capital letters on her countenance.

"It's you, ye thochtless ne'er-do-weel! What kin' o' conduct's this, Willie Weedrap? At your auld tricks again! comin' hame frae your merry-meetings at twa in the mornin' as fou's the Clyde in spate! Eh, mercy me! what a hat! an' what a pair o' black een! Whaur, in a' the earth, ha'e ye been, sir; tell me this vera instant?"

"Stop! stop! Betty, my dear; dinna let your temper rin awa' wi' your judgment; it's a' richt, as richt's the mail. Gi'e me a moment's breathing grace, an' I'll explain the matter wi' the speed o' a sixpenny telegram. My hat's bash't awae, it's true, an' so is my heid [tenderly fingering the organ of Benevolence], no' to mention my twa 'keekers.' But I can explain a'—explain a', Betty."

"So can I, Willie. I can explain't a' tae. Ye're fou! an' that explains everything!"

"No, no, Betty, my dear; as sure's ye're staunin' there, I havena tasted twa 'half-yins' since I left the hoose! (In an *aside*: They were a' hale yins.) But the fact is, Betty, I was struck on the heid the nicht wi' a meteoric stane!"

"A meteoric stane, Willie?"

"It's a fack's ye're there!"

"A meteoric stane,?"

"Ay, Betty, a falling star, ye ken. See, there's the evidence o't; jist look at the condition o' that hat; it speaks eloquently for itsel', if no' for my theory. It's a mercy. I'm a leevin' man this minute! It was a sair whack on the

napper I got, I can tell ye" (fingering the crown of his head).

"A falling star, Willie, did ye say?"

"Ay, a falling star, Betty! Did ye no' read in the *Weekly Mail* the ither day about a hale shoouer o' them?"

"I daursay I did, noo that I bethink mysel' a wee. An' dae ye mean to stan' there, an' tell me to my face, that you were struck on the heid the nicht by a falling star?"

"Faith, Betty, my dear, baith my hat an' my heid ken that this minute. They were comin' doon as thick as hail-stanes; the Trongate's fu' o' them. We're passin' through the tail o' a comet the noo, ye ken, an' that accoonts for the phenomenon!"

"An' could ye no' put up your umbrella, Willie?"

"That's exactly whaur I was taken short, Betty—the want o' an umbrella. I was storm-sted in a close at the heid o' the Sautmarket for better than twa hours; an' when, thinkin' on you, Betty dear, I did at last venture oot, I was struck doon before I had coonted twenty paces."

"Eh, me! what's things comin' to, I wonder? It's surely near the end o' the world. An' was there nae accidents happened to life an' limb besides your ain mishap, Willie?"

"Accidents, Petty dear? Ay, faith, lots o' them! The Sautmarket's fu' o' deid policemen. Jist wait till ye see the newspapers the morn!"

"Eh, Willie! it's a fair mercy ye're a leevin' man this nicht. What a pity ye didna think o' takin' an umbrella wi' ye; there's an auld yin below the bed there that a hale street could hide in."

"Weel, I'll try an' mind that next November, Betty; in the meantime, squeeze back that damaged hat into something like Christian shape, an' syne mak' a cauld-watter poultice for the croon o' my heid; for the fell crack I got on my napper this nicht is like to be the death o' me. It's gowpen like a puddock's jump; an' my twa blessed lugs

have been singin' 'Paddy Whack, the Piper,' ever since I got the murderin' skelp."

"Ay, Willie, but listen awee. Meteoric stanes here, or meteoric stanes there, the vera best cauld-watter poultice an' protecting umbrella-cover ye can get for your heid between this and the next November starry stane-battle, is jist the *the signin' o' the teetotal pledge!* That umbrella protecting ye, ye may safely whistle—'What's a' the steer, kimmer?' an' blaw rain, blaw snaw, ye'll then come hame ashale in baith hat an' heid as a dooce kirk-elder returning frae a Presbytery meeting. The meteoric theory 'ill no' haud watter, Willie; it let's oot at baith ends. The meteor that knocked ye doon the nicht was jist the wee mischief-workin' gill-stowp. It cowp't you, as it has often cowp't mony a stronger man. Sae, the vera best thing ye can dae, Willie, is to firmly pit in the pin, an' laying astronomy aside, stick like glue to the makin' an' mendin' o' cluggs."

"But think, Betty, only think for a moment on the lofty music of the rolling spheres!"

"The music o' the rollin' spheres! H'm! there's better music in the hamely tramp o' a pair o' guid airn-shod cluggs ony day."

"Weel, that's at least guid, sensible domestic astronomy onyway, Betty, if it's no science; an' I'll no' say but ye may be richt, after a'. Ye've gotten haud o' the best end o' the stick onyway; for you've got, like a true woman, the last word, an' I've got—a splittin' headache."