

Our John's a rare genius in his way, he's aye after some droll invention or ither, an' there's nae end to his ingenuity.

Yae mornin' about a fortnicht back since he "sleepit in," an' quo' he, "Tib, that's twice I've sleepit in since the New-Year, but I'll sleep in nae mair. I've got an idea, an' I'll set to an' develop it at yince."

Sae down went John's elbows on the breakfast table, an' clap gaed his heid between his twa han's; an' "I've got it Tib," said he, after five-and-twenty minutes' close thoct, "I've got it—a new idea o' a compound alarum bell, an' I'll hae it ringin' like a kirk-steeple bell this nicht week."

John's a born genius, there's nae twa ways aboot that. His plan was this:—The clock, ye maun ken, was yin o' thir auld middlety-noddlety sort that wag industriously across the yellow-ochred wa's. John, ye see, designed a wee wheelological instrument o' the curiousest kind, wi' ever sae mony engineerical turlie-whurlies aboot it. The inside works were as fu' o' brains and mechanical unnerstandin' as John's

gifted heid could pang them ; an' this was the programme o' heidy contrivances an' sleep-breakin' noises expected to be set agoing at half-past five o'clock on the following mornin' :—

The wag-at-the-wa' would be set half an hour forrit, an' in chappin' six o'clock the descendin' wecht would licht upon the trikker o' John's compleccated machine, the ball o' which would begin to descend and the hammer to reverberate jist as the clock bell ran oot. On the road down, an' while busy alarming John, the wecht would first flap doon the bunker-lid, cowp a lot o' balanced stools, an' then screw on the gas-light full. John's coffee-can would be hung conveniently owre the gas-burner, an' while the guidman was findin' his way inside his breeks, the gas would be nicely warmin' the coffee. So much for John's patent alarum.

"Tib," said the guidman to me yae nicht, just as the eerie chap o' ten was ringin' thro' the toun, "the patent alarum is noo loaded, an' we may baith gang to bed an' sleep as soun' as the birds in the woods. That new patent alarum o' mine would wauken the vera deid !"

Sae aff to rest we baith gaed, John an' I, an' presently fell soun' asleep, jist like twa spinnin' peeries. I sleepit soun' an' sweet—I'm positive o' that. But jist as the dawn began to grey the sky I maun hae fa'en to the dreamin'. I had been readin' a nicht or twa before aboot the Fa's o' Niagara. I thocht I was there. I was walking under them. The roar that was in my ears was perfectly deafenin'. I started, screamed, an' wauken'd clean up in a nervous fricht. Sittin' bolt upright, I rubbed my e'en, stuffed my fingers into my ears, an' considered for a moment the exact situation. Yes, yes ; John's alarum was comin' thunderin' doon, an' the hoose was as fu' o' sound as the thrangest boat-yaird on the Clyde. I would rouse up John, I thocht. But no ; I would sit still an' watch the effeek o' John's invention—on himsel'.

An' there he lay, kickin' an' flingin' an' groanin' an' moanin', under the awfu' noise o' the descendin' alarum, like a man fair demented. In a moment the descendin' wecht bleez'd up the gas, an' struck doon the bunker lid, an'—ow! —what a smash! John, puir man, breeng't aff the braid o' his back clean roun' on to the flett o' his stammack. The next moment doun bang'd the front flap o' the bunker, an' John, puir man, precipitately fulfilled the Highland sergeant's command—"As you was!" Anither moment, an' the wean's chair was flang thump, dump down; then smash gaed a big stool, an' a second after, breenge went a pair o' big bread servers.

At this extreme juncture, John, clean bye-himself, jump't bolt upright, and steadied himself on his beam-end on the tap o' the blankets. His e'en were burnin' like twa Hallowe'en lights, an' the hairs o' his heid were standin' strecht oot, like a bunch o' daurnin' needles in a sawdust preen-cushion. The cat, puir thing, had been fleein' frantically but-an'-ben the hoose a' the time; an' to croun a', oor wee Skye terrier dowg, hauf demented wi' fricht, set up a series o' the most dismal, melancholy, an' heart-breakin' yowls.

John sat in bed, stock-still, an' silently listened to it a'. Triumph was workin' in every line o' his face. The alarum was a tremendous success! Yae wild spring, an' he was oot on the centre o' the fluir, snappin' his fingers, whistlin' "Tullochgorum," an' hoochin' an' leapin' like a dementit Highlandman, his sleepin' shirt daein' duty for a short kilt. Meantime, hauf-a-dizzen nervous sleepers had their peacefu' dreams shattered that mornin' by a succession o' patent thunder-claps.

A nicht policeman, too, who had been shelterin' himself frae the rain at the stairfit, succeeded in makiu' things doubly worse by fiercely springin' his rattle, under a settled conviction that the hail building was fa'in' in,—was gaun, in fack, to general pigs an' whussels!

John, perfectly undisturbed by the terrible consequences o' his patent ideas, drew on his breeks, an' mutterin' something about his "star being in the ascendant," sat down an' steadied his nerves wi' a moothfu' o' warm coffee.

The neighbors roun' about, however, took events less quately. Windows gaed fleein' up, heids bobbed out, an' doors were flung open on every stairhead. In three minutes, or less, the staircase, frae tap flett to bottom landing, was crooded wi' terrified an' exasperated auld wives, picturesquely attired in red flannen petticoats, white short gowns, an' close-tied starchless nitches, an' everybody was asking every ither body what was the maitter—wha's gas meter had burst? But naebody succeeded in turning the gas on the dark mystery.

A Dutch sailor—Von Tromp by name—wha lived in the tap sky-licht when at hame, presently cam' tearin' down the stairs, three staps at a time, his heavy sea-boots thrust hurriedly on, his sou'-wester crushed low down on his broo, an' his muckle reefin' jacket flung loosely across his airm. On the road down he cowp't successively three separate auld wives wha were industriously pechin' their way up the stairs in search o' explanations.

"Von Tromp! Von Tromp!! Von Tromp!!!" screamed everybody in startling chorus, "what ava's the maitter?"

"Breakers somewhere on de wedder bow; round helm, spread sail, an' coot stick before de wind," shouted the Dutch sailor, never stopping to look once behind him, but crushing wildly on "before de wind," an' running down, in his hot hurry, the excited policeman who had sprung his rattle at the stairfit three minutes before, an' who was now hurrying up to learn wha's roof had fa'n in.

Recovering his feet wi' astonishing speed, the bumbased official turned on his lamp, blew his whussel like a locomotive, an' sprung afresh his noisy rattle, winding up

business by staring the hail stairhead full in the face, an' asking in a bewildered an' general sort o' way—

“Wad some o' the folks no opeege her by makin' a 'shairge'?”

“A chairge!” cried half-a-dizzen voices, “whit richt hae ye to spring yer rattle on the sleepin' lan'? wha sent for you? what richt, in fack, hae ye here ava'?”

“Have I no as more richt here nor you?” demanded the angry official, wi' a self-reliant cock o' the heid.

“Fling that bunch o' dried heather down the stair,” roared Rab Rough, the blacksmith. And the “bunch o' dried heather” fell promptly back in view of bringing up a required support.

But what about oor John a' this time? Weel, ye ken, I was busy listenin' at the key-hole to a' that had transpired on the stairheid; an' when the panic was fairly owre, an' the policeman had been shoosted wide o' the neighbourhood for his vera life, I staps in atowre to John, an'—

“Guidman,” quo' I, “that's a dreidfu' wark ye've dune, the hail lan', frae tap to fit, is in a nervous commotion.”

“It's glorious! Tib; clean glorious!! A greater success than this hisna been kenn'd since the days o' Galileo. Never mind the commotion amang the neebors. There's aye a bit stoorie rumpus amang ordinary folks when men o' great original genius like me shake society wi' their ideas. Sit ye doun, Tib, sit ye doun. Oor fortune's made at last. There's no a workin' man, between Ben Nevis an' Camlachie, but'll gang in for yin o' my patent alarums when yince the tremendous virtue o' them's kenn'd. Yin o' them, richtly handled, wad wauken a hail regiment o' sodgers, let alane a single sleeper. Sit doun, Tib! sit doun, an' tak' a moothfu' o' this coffee. It's perfeckly delicious, Tib. Twa-three sips o't 'ill mak' yer goupin' nerves as quate's a kirk moose.”

"But, O John," quo' I, "ye'll hear mair o' this or I'm gey fawr cheatit," gi'en my heid a solemn shake.

"A monument as heich's the tap brick o' Tennant's stalk 'ill be the upshot o't, Tib," said John, clappin' my shooters consolingly, till my vera heart louped intae my mooth.

Noo, John didna stir a fit to his wark a' that eventfu' mornin'; sae, as we sat thegither at the breakfast table—"John," I began, wi' a bit coaxin' lauch, "if the result o' your grand new patent alarum is the keepin' ye oot o' yer wark of a mornin', it can hardly be said to be fulfillin' the purpose for which it was designed."

"Hoot-toots!" ejaculated John "ye ken naething about the sublime exstotics o' genius. Wha could gang to their wark in the face o' sic an overwhelmin' triumph? It pits the clean Peter on Jeems Watt an' the steam engine—thrice owre. Gang to my wark! Tib. It wid be a dounricht prostitution o' logic an' rationality; naething short o't. Tib—naething short o't;" an' John thereupon began snappin' his fingers an' whusslin' like fury, "ALL AMONG THE CLOVER."

Weel, the vera next nicht, word gaed roun' the lan' that there were nae fewer than seven auld wives lyin' deid-ill o' shaken nerves an' low fever, resultin' frae the fearfu' fricht they had got, an' John, in spite o't a', persisted in his determination to load the alarum full-cock that nicht, an' that, too, wi' several improved additions, intendin', as he declared, to ring up the hail building, an' thereby consolidate an' assure the success o' his new invention.

Weel, I was perfeckly putten by mysel' wi' the bare thoct o't. Sae I gets on my chacket shawl an' my market bonnet, an' awa' I gangs across to my guid-brither—Johnny InkBottle, the lawyer's copying-clerk—an' I tells him what's what, an' what I wantit dune.

Sae, jist to frichten John aff his mad intention, he traces oot a big fearsome-lookin' note o' interdiction against JOHN

MUCKLE-DIN, chairgin' the said JOHN MUCKLE-DIN wi' a violent an' unprovoked molestation o' the neighbourhood, to the discomfort an' injury o' the lieges, an' threat'nin' a' sorts o' punishment, if the annoyance was persisted in, in the high name o' the Captain o' the Police, the which dockiment he promised to immediately send owre to John.

Weel, back I gangs, an' five minutes after, an official knock comes to the door, an' a heavily-sealed an' awesome-lookin' dockiment was handed gruffly in.

"John! John!! what's this at a' ava?" cried I, handin' him the legal dockiment, an' lookin' three fourths in a fent, ne'er lettin' on I kent ocht about it.

John opened it, cannily, but deliberately, lookin' jist a thochtie blue on the subject, an', "Tib," quo' he, "it's a letter o' interdiction against my alarum, frae the Lord Provost, nae less, wi' as mony 'WHEREFOR'S' an' 'WHEREAS'S' scatter'd through it as wid cowp the wits o' onybody short o' a man wi' a poother'd wig. Weel, if that's no putten the veto on a man o' genius, I'll jump the kirk steeple."

I tried to pacify him by showin' him the reasonableness o' the interdict, but—

"Na, na," quo' John, "it's rale even-doon persecution; naething short o't, Tib. They did the same thing, long ago, to Galileo—a man of genius like mysel'. Ay! Tib; an' this is Great Britain, an' this the boasted 19th century! Lord, I could thraw the neck o' that narrow-souled Captain o' the Police! His mind's no the size o' a George the Third sixpence!"

Weel, to mak' a lang story short, the interdict was rumbled angrily up an' stapped viciously ahint the fire; an' the alarum, wi' a' its patent wechts an' fastenin's, was that same nicht lowsed saucily down, an', there and then, broken up into flinders, that an ungratefu' warld micht never profit by the idea.

O'd, I never was mair pleased wi' onything in my life

than jist to see John break up his patent machine. An' if ever oor John thinks o' constructin' anither Patent Sleep-Breakin' Alarum, I hope an' trust he'll succeed in makin' yin that'll wauken himsel', withoot exactly rousin' up a haill street.

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