

## MRS. M'MINN'S SECOND MAN

"It's an awfu' peety for ye, Mrs. M'Minn," said Jemima Jamieson, with an expression of supreme commiseration on her rather oily face, "for Tammy M'Minn wasna a bad man, mind."

"Ye're right there, Mrs. Jamieson; ye're right there," wailed Mrs. M'Minn, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. "Tammy had his fauts, I aloo, but he was a rale decent man, an' it's only noo he's awa' that I miss him. What I'll dae without him I div not know. Yes, I div not know!" she repeated, again making gentle application of the apron to each eye in rhythmical succession.

The two ladies were seated in the kitchen of Mrs. Jamieson's house in one of the poorer streets not far from Gorbals Cross, Glasgow. It was the forenoon of the day following the funeral of the late lamented Tammas M'Minn, and Jemima Jamieson had deemed it but a neighbourly act to invite Betsy M'Minn into her domicile for a quiet, comforting "crack" and "a wee taste o' spirits" to add to the

effectiveness of the hospitality thus proffered. If the truth must be told, however, Jemima was influenced by other motives than the mere desire to show sympathy to the relict of the dead "Tammy." She had the reputation of being the greatest gossip-monger in the Gorbals, and would have walked ten miles any day to discuss a local scandal, get the first information of a forthcoming marriage, or glean a tit-bit of news concerning any individual blessed—or cursed—with her friendship. In the present case she was simply boiling over to know whether the deceased Tammy M'Minn had been insured or not, and whether her friend Betsy would have "anything coming" beyond her husband's Burial Society money. Could she but discover this, she would be the most important woman in the Gorbals for days to come. Being a lady of considerable wiliness, Mrs. Jamieson did not plunge at once into the topic nearest her heart, but approached it in a roundabout fashion. The other's last spoken words gave her the necessary cue.

"What'll ye dae, Mrs. M'Minn?" she went on, sadly, "ay, what'll ye dae? That's the pint! What can ony puir woman dae that's left without a man—an' nae money!"

"Oh, but I have money, Jemima!" replied Mrs.

M'Minn rather proudly, stiffening her head on her neck—"no much, ye ken, to mak' up for the loss o' a man," she continued, "but mair than lots o' women get in my poseshon!"

This one went home to Mrs. Jamieson rather severely, because it was common property in the street that when Peter Jamieson went aloft—or elsewhere—he left his spouse without two shillings to rub together. Jemima, however, swallowed the veiled remark without comment; she couldn't just then afford to quarrel with Mrs. M'Minn!

"I'm rale gled to hear it, Mrs. M'Minn," she replied. "A pound or twa in the Bank's no to be sneezed at, mind!" Then, in the most unconcerned manner imaginable, she inquired: "Tammy wouldna be heavy insured, was he, Betsy?" at the same time filling up her friend's almost empty glass.

Mrs. M'Minn watched the latter operation with a considerable degree of interest, but she was careful not to play into the other's hands so far as her answer to the insidious question was concerned.

"Well, no what you or me would ca' heavy," she admitted, "but still I've nothing to complain o'. Tammy's dune his duty to me better deid than ever he did livin'—nae disrespect to him noo that he's

awa'." And once more the apron went up to the eyes.

"I'm awfu' gled to hear it, Betsy," continued the other. "Ye'll no want for freen's in this world sae lang as ye can draw a pound or twa at the Bank. Ye should start a wee shop."

"A shop!" exclaimed Betsy. "O, I hivna the nerve to staun' ahint a coonter. I'm sure ye ken that fine!"

Mrs. Jamieson remembered the sly reference to the financial condition in which she had been left when Peter "hooked it," and was sorely tempted to make a stinging reply to this assertion on the part of her neighbour. But the moment was inopportune.

"Well, Betsy," she merely replied, "there's nothing I can see for ye but keepin' lodgers. There's lots o' trouble wi' them when they get drunk, but the money's a'richt, especially if ye're in the Co-Operative. I've never had less than twa lodgers masel', an' the woman's no up to much that canna mak' a rale guid livin' aff twa lodgers. Besides," she concluded, with just a shade of malice in her tones, "if ye're carefu' ye nicht get anither man!"

"I won'er to hear ye, Jemima Jamieson," exclaimed Betsy, bristling up, "speaking like that an'

Tammy M'Minn no cauld in the mools yet! It's a fair affront! Of course," she went on, rising from her chair and surveying her "friend" from head to heel with a withering stare, "a'body kens that ye're no' very particular in them things yersel'. What about the milkman ye frichten'd aff the road a month efter yer ain man dee't? It was the scandal o' the toon!"

This was too much for Jemima, who cast discretion to the winds, and would there and then, in the fulness of her rage, have done some physical injury to her guest had not the latter "joked" round the table and made a hurried exit from the house.

To cut uninteresting details, it may merely be said that Mrs. M'Minn, either acting on her own ideas of the situation or accepting the recommendation of friends and relations, duly blossomed forth as a Glasgow landlady.

Her first lodger was a big elderly Irishman, and he had only been in residence in the "land" for two days when Jemima Jamieson discovered that his name was Barney Lacey, that he was a "gaffer" at the Tradeston Gas Works, that his wages were twenty-eight shillings a week, that he was a widower with no family, and that he was being "swindled by that woman M'Minn to the tune of at least

ten bob a week." To this information she hastened to add—for she did not by any means keep it to herself—that he was a "saft-hertit lump, an' would be run in by that schemin' limmer, Betsy M'Minn, afore three months were ower." The phrase "run in," it need hardly be explained, had reference to another probable matrimonial venture on the part of his landlady.

Big Barney found himself exceedingly comfortable with Widow M'Minn. He was a quiet, well-conducted man throughout the week, but on Saturday evening he rolled into the street "full up," and just managed to stagger upstairs to his landlady's door before collapsing in a heap. Mrs. M'Minn, assisted by a grocer's message boy, pulled him into the house and slammed the door.

"She maun be as bold as brass," remarked Jemima Jamieson to a neighbour in the washing-house on Monday morning, surveying the events of Saturday night. "Think on her bein' left in the hoose wi' only that drucken beast beside her! I do believe she took aff his claes an' put him to bed—the woman that hadna the nerve to staun' ahint a coonter!"

"I never thocht muckle o' Betsy M'Minn," was all the comment that Jean M'Tavish allowed her-

self, but she did not furnish the information that her dislike for Betsy dated from the day that the latter refused to lend her half a crown to make up the children's insurance money, which she had spent on drink.

"Muckle o' her!" snorted Mrs. Jamieson as she shouldered her clean clothes and left the washing-house, "a shameless randy—that's what I ca' her!"

As the days went on, Mrs. M'Minn provided subject matter for further discussion amongst the neighbours. Her Irish lodger seemed to be thoroughly content with his new home, and he went out less and less in the evenings. The next Saturday night he came home in quite a respectable condition—not more than half-drunk—a return to Saturday righteousness which he had not known for years. The improvement thereafter was so pronounced that on the sixth Saturday of his residence with Mrs. M'Minn he came straight home from the Celtic-Rangers football match, and later in the evening was seen to saunter forth with his landlady, presumably to do the week-end shopping together.

On the stair they met Jemima Jamieson, who was so "flabbergasted," to use her own picturesque expression, that she had to run into Mrs. M'Tavish's house and beg for "a drap o' something." Mrs.

M'Tavish happened to have the needful, and, not being averse to joining in the little ceremony, the two ladies discussed the disgraceful and unparalleled conduct of Mrs. M'Minn in no measured terms. Subsequently they adjourned to get the views of the neighbours on the ground floor, but as both of these were out they returned to Mrs. M'Tavish's domicile, and duly punished the remainder of the half-mutchkin which that lady had, with creditable foresight, laid in for Sunday consumption.

But if the events of Saturday night gave rise to such indignation in the breasts of these virtuous females, what can be said of their horror on beholding, next afternoon, the joint departure from the tenement of Mrs. M'Minn and the stalwart gas-worker? To all appearances they were off for a walk or a run on the car, and Barney was happiness personified as he looked down on the trig and comely figure at his side.

"Oh, the brazen-faced bizzum, the shameless cat, the—the—witch!" exclaimed Jemima Jamieson, bursting into Mrs. M'Tavish's house, and breathlessly dragging her friend to the window. "Jist look at them! Can ye believe yer e'en? An' puir Tammy M'Minn no' twa month in the grave! She should get shoved in the Clyde!"



Jean M'Tavish eagerly "craned" her neck at the far side of the window and had no difficulty in viewing the scene which had so roused the wrath—or the jealousy—of her friend. But she was more matter-of-fact than Mrs. Jamieson, and her first comment showed her to be the possessor of a very observant eye and a capital memory.

"I see he's got on Tammy M'Minn's coat—the yin he bocht for Tibbie Simpson's mairriage! An' I'll bet the trousers are Tammy's forbye, though I couldna swear to them! I won'er the big Irish stirk doesna drap deid!"

"Did ye no see the tie he's wearin'?" excitedly put in Jemima. "No! ye'll no' see it wi' his back turn't, but I got a switch o't as they went oot, an' I could wager I seen Betsy buyin' the silk to mak' it at the Co-Op. on Tuesday efternune! I won'er't at the time what she was buyin' silk balls for! Oh! but she's a fly limmer; didn't I tell ye a' what would happen?"

Before Mrs. M'Minn and her lover had been ten minutes clear of the street, the news of their "on-goings" had been wafted like wildfire over the surrounding tenements—thanks to the diligent tongues of Mrs. Jamieson and Mrs. M'Tavish—and when they returned a couple of hours later every win-

dow held its quota of eager, gossiping women-folk who were all agreed that Mrs. Betsy M'Minn's heartless conduct warranted no less drastic punishment than "something with boiling oil in it." The pair most intimately concerned in these observations, however, serenely wended their way upstairs, Mrs. M'Minn well pleased to think of the jealous pangs in Jemima Jamieson's bosom—she caught the tail-end of Jemima's eye behind the dirty curtains on the second floor—and Big Barney equally delighted over the palpable progress he was making in the affections of the buxom widow.

Over their cup of tea half an hour later the amorous Irishman came suddenly to the point. A great wave of love seemed to sweep over him; Widow M'Minn looked so tempting in her crape dress with the little touch of white on her ample bosom!

"Shure, Mistress M'Minn, I can't kape the words back any longer—will ye change yer name to Mrs. Barney Lacey? It's as good a toitle as the one ye've got, an' it's a good man that offers it yez!" This was Barney's declaration of love.

Mrs. M'Minn blushed furiously and became so confused that she dropped her cup, smashing the saucer beneath it into a dozen pieces. The scalding tea splashed all over the table, and some of it fell

on Barney's knee. Up he jumped. So did the widow. Their eyes met and the accident was promptly forgotten, Barney slipping his arm round his landlady's by no means slender waist, and stealing a kiss there and then.

"When will we get married, me darlin'?" was Barney's first question after they had recovered their mutual equanimity.

"Well, Barney, dear," whispered the widow, again blushing coyly, "it can't be for a long time yet—three months anyway. It wouldna be dacent to Tammy, an' the neebours would mak' a perfect speculation o't if I taen anither man inside o' six months. So we'll jist hae to wait."

The Irishman used all his "Blarney" to make the widow relent and marry him straight off, but Mrs. M'Minn was determined, and even went the length of insisting on keeping their "engagement" private until the happy day should arrive. This meant that they must be seen abroad no more together; for, as Betsy said, "thae weemin aboot the doors had awfu' tongues, an' her character wad be fair torn to pieces if she an' Barney were kent to be coortin'." Besides, Mrs. M'Minn confided to her lover that she desired this arrangement, because it would enable

her to spring a complete surprise on the neighbours generally, and on Jemima Jamieson in particular.

So Barney, much against his will be it said, had perforce to fall in with the plan, but he swore again and again that he would never live through the three weary months which lay between him and the "colleen of his heart."

Gradually Jemima Jamieson and the other neighbours began to observe that Mrs. M'Minn and her lodger were never now seen outside together, and the story went around that they had quarrelled, and that Barney was simply "stayin' on" with Mrs. M'Minn because of his dislike to changing lodgings. Mrs. Jamieson was overjoyed to think that her enemy had had a "set back," and it occurred to her that there was no reason why she herself should not endeavour to get into the Irishman's good graces. He was "a fine strappin' man," she said to herself, "an' twenty-eight bob wasna a bad pey comin' in every week!" So she laid herself out to ingratiate herself with Mrs. M'Minn's lodger, and was usually hanging about her door or on the stairs at the hours when Barney came from or went to his work.

One evening when she knew Mrs. M'Minn was away visiting a friend in Springburn she actually

invited Barney into her house for "a cup o' tea"—an invitation which he refused on the plea that he was due at a meeting of the "Hibernians"—and in many other ways she gave him to understand her partiality for his company. As a matter of fact, Jemima was now head over ears in love with the gallant gasworker, and she resolved to make one bold effort to secure his affections. What more potent device to this end could be imagined than the sending to him of a pair of braces? Jemima "swithered" long and earnestly between braces and socks, but the braces carried the day. They were sent by post along with a brief and very illiterate note to the effect that the shamrock design had been sewn by her own hands, and that she, Jemima Jamieson, "hoped Mr. Lacey would be long spared to wear them."

Well knowing the nature of the sentiments harboured by his landlady for Jemima Jamieson, Barney had never said a word to the former about Jemima's palpable efforts to inveigle him. He was naturally a peace-loving man, and had no desire to form the subject of an open outbreak between two jealous women. The arrival of the braces, however, brought matters to a head, and Barney felt compelled to report the receipt of Jemima's gift to his

sweetheart, adding many protestations—for Mrs. M'Minn was inclined to be suspicious—of his innocence in the whole affair.

At first Betsy was struck dumb with astonishment, but rage succeeded her surprise, and she quickly found her tongue.

“Oh, the impidence o' that woman! Oh, the twa-faced, sleekit slut! to send my lodger a pair o' gallases, an' to ma ain hoose forbye! It's past thinkin'! Oh, the double dealin', shameless bizzum! For less than tu'pence I wad draw the buckles o' the gallases across the left side o' her jaw!” And poor Mrs. M'Minn, quite overcome, sank back into her chair and moaned aloud.

Barney did his best to console her by repeated assurances that he loved her and her alone, and that he had never in the slightest degree encouraged the attentions of Jemima Jamieson. After a time Mrs. M'Minn became more collected, and expressed the resolve to take Jemima's present down to the lady's house and return it along with “a bit o' her mind.”

Barney, however, was averse to any such course, arguing that no good would come of it, that there would be certain to be “a divil of a Kilkenny row” when the two women met, and that the neighbours

would all be "turned out to a choild." So he prevailed upon the widow to sit down on her chair, and proceeded to unfold a plan which he had evolved for the return of the braces and the discomfiture of Jemima Jamieson.

"The chance is sure to come, alannah," he concluded, "an' she'll be struck stone dumb afore her gossipin' neighbours. Then ye'll be revenged for everything she's done to ye, me darlin'."

So Barney put the braces in his pocket and carried them with him for a couple of days. He did not want to meet Jemima alone, because that would have spoiled his scheme, but, as great good luck had it, the first time he met her she was standing at the "close mooth" with Jean M'Tavish, Mrs. Simpson, Mrs. Macdonald, and several other kindred spirits, all eagerly discussing the latest marriage in the district.

Jemima smiled affably as Barney approached, and drew slightly aside from her companions to receive the looked-for words of thanks which she was certain Barney was dying to convey to her. But her surprise and horror were beyond expression when the big Irishman stopped right in the midst of the crowd of women and addressed her pointedly, and in the hearing of all present.

"It's very koind and neighbourly of yez, Mrs. Jamieson, to send me them braces"—drawing the parcel out of his pocket—"but the Widow M'Minn says that I've got to hand them back to yez! Perhaps they'll do for some other man that's not going to get married."

Jemima gasped. "Mrs. M'Minn!" she half-shrieked. "Married! Who's goin' to get married? I thocht you an' her had fa'en oot?"

"Oh," said Barney, with a quiet smile, pushing the parcel into Mrs. Jamieson's arms, "that's only the gossip o' this gossipin' tiniment! Mrs. M'Minn's goin' to change her name to Mrs. Barney Lacey, an' I want to mate the man as says it ain't a better!" Then Barney passed upstairs.

Poor Jemima stole shamefacedly to her own house, the scornful laughter of her friends ringing in her ears. She was made the butt of every female in the street, and even her friend, Jean M'Tavish, said it "served her richt for tryin' to steal anither woman's man."

A week before Mrs. M'Minn's wedding Jemima Jamieson flitted from the Gorbals.