

THE HEATIN' O' THE HOOSE

"GAUN up to Jamie Morrison's the night, Harry?" asked a miner chum of me one evening some twenty years ago as he and I stepped off the "cage" at Eddlewood Colliery after a hard, wet "shift."

"I wasna thinkin' about it, Watty," was my reply. "What's on?"

"Oh! have ye no' heard? Jamie's gettin' mairied on Friday, and there's a bunch o' us chaps gaun up the night to heat the hoose for them. You should come."

"Will there be ony fun?" was my next query.

"Sure to be!" was Watty Anderson's emphatic reply. "Baith the guid-fathers will be there, an' I'm telt they havena much love for each ither. You should slip up for an 'oor or twa."

I thereupon agreed to be one of the party. Jamie Morrison I only knew slightly, but his sweetheart was one of the prettiest girls in Hamilton, and—until she finally "took up" with Jamie—was much

courted by the young miners of the town. As a matter of fact, I had had a bold bid myself for the affections of the young lady, but, meeting with little success, had transferred my heart to another, and—need I say it?—an even better quarter. To this extent, therefore, I could claim to have a slight interest in Jamie Morrison's approaching wedding, so that there was nothing out of place in my resolving to form one of the "house-warming" party. I hurried home, washed the coal dust from my hands and face, polished off a gigantic plateful of ham and eggs—the young miner's favourite supper—and set out downtown to find in some of the Hamilton shops a suitable present for Jamie and his future wife.

Nobody in Lanarkshire takes part in the interesting ceremony I have referred to without carrying with him a gift of some kind or another. It is the equivalent in higher walks of life of sending your marriage present to the house of the bride, and it has this advantage: that you can offer in person, along with the handing over of the gift, your felicitations and your good wishes for a "happy wedded life and a large family."

At eight o'clock some half-dozen of us all met by appointment and sauntered up to the house, where,

a day or two later, Jamie Morrison was to bring bonny Katie Lee as his partner for weal or woe. Jamie himself came to the door, and gleefully ushered us into the kitchen—as cosy and tidy a wee nook as ever you saw. The walls had been freshly papered; the fireplace was shining; the yellow wax-cloth was spotless; and the bed—well, a Princess might have had a costlier resting-place prepared for her, but certainly not a cleaner or more inviting. Everything was “split-new,” and in apple-pie order, and Jamie proudly stood aside while the “boys” looked round in admiration.

“But whaur’s Kate?” latterly asked big Sandy Vallance, nudging Jamie in the ribs and winking slyly. “The place is no complete without a mistress, ye ken.”

“That’s richt enough, Sandy,” replied Jamie, laughing, “but she doesna get the job afore Friday nicht. Besides, she bade me tell ye that she was ower bashfu’ to wait for ye, but she hopes ye’ll a’ hae a good time. I wantit her to wait, but lassies are awfu’ queer craiturs, especially jist afore they’re mairried.”

“Well, Jamie,” remarked Tam Smith, the ostler at the pit where we were all employed, “you’ve done

her a treat, mind I'm tellin' ye! It's no every lass that gets such a dandy doon-sittin'!"

Then we began to produce our respective presents. Watty Anderson had brought a canary in a cage.

"Here, Jamie," was all Watty said by way of a "presentation" speech as he set the cage down on the table and stripped off the brown paper encircling the bars; "it's a rare whistler! I bred it maseel', an' I widna tak' a pound-note for the cock it cam' aff! When you an' the wife hae a row it'll sing like the deevil an' keep the neebours frae hearin'."

Another of the company coolly walked over to the fireplace, noted with great satisfaction that while there was a fender with "Home, Sweet Home" engraved upon it, there were no fire-irons, and promptly opened up a parcel containing a full set of these homely but necessary implements. The tongs, poker, and shovel he arranged as artistically as he could, and, the task completed, he expressed the cheerful hope that Jamie would never have cause to use the poker on "the wife's heid."

"A body never kens," jocularly responded Jamie, "but I dinna think I'll ever sae far forget maseel'—that is, if she does what she's telt."

"Hear, hear!" was the approving chorus from the crowd.

A red cotton tablecover was produced by another, a set of forks and knives by a fourth, and every one of the visitors followed with some handy and useful household articles. My gifts, if I remember correctly, were a paraffin lamp, a tin pail, and a blacklead brush! Jamie was kept busy returning his thanks, and if these were expressed in quiet, homely language, they were none the less sincere and heartfelt.

"Man, lads, Kate'll be as prood as a Queen when she comes ower the morn's mornin' an' sees a' thae fine things. It's a rale help to a fellow," he added, "for there's a heap o' expense when ye get mairried."

"Yer richt there, Jamie!" exclaimed Sandy Valance. "I'll wager ye've broken the back o' a ten-pound note already?"

"Ay, easy, Sandy," responded the prospective bridegroom with a solemn shake of his head. But then, brightening instantly, he added: "She's worth it a', tho'!"

"I'm awfu' dry!" here interjected one of the younger men, casting his eyes in the direction of a basket beneath the table. The observation at once

brought Jamie back to a sense of his duties, and he apologised profusely for his apparent neglect as he pulled the basket from its resting-place.

"I'm that excitit I clean forgot about the booze!" he went on. "There's beer, porter, and whisky here—plenty o' them a'! Jist sing oot what ye'll hae! Peter Purdie! ye'll get some tumblers in that press there! Mind ye dinna break them—they're a present frae the wife's mither."

Peter Purdie was by no means unwilling to lend assistance, and soon we were a jovial company. Of course the first toast was "Long life and happiness," etc., and it was pledged with the utmost enthusiasm. Old Jamie Morrison, young Jamie's father, dropped in just in time to honour the toast, and a few minutes later Davit Lee, Kate's father, also put in an appearance. Both worthies were cordially welcomed and provided with seats, one on each side of a roaring fire.

"Will ye hae some water in yer whusky, Davit?" asked young Jamie, solicitously attending to the comforts of the latest arrival.

"'Deed, no," growled Davit, "the Hamilton whusky's well enough watter't afore it leaves the pubs."

This humorous observation from the old man put

everybody in the best of glee, and a long "toast-list" was proceeded with. A bumper was quaffed to "the bridegroom," another to "the bride," and a third to "the best man," and a fourth—I really forget what the fourth, fifth, sixth, and succeeding toasts were, but you can take it from me that they were done thorough justice to.

By this time several of the company were in a particularly happy, not to say garrulous, frame of mind, and the fun and banter waxed fast and furious as one cork plunked after another.

"Well, Jamie," broke out Sandy Vallance, during a temporary lull in the proceedings, "I've only ane bit o' advice to gie ye, an' if ye tak' it it'll save ye a heap o' trouble."

"What's that, Sandy?" asked the prospective bridegroom laughingly.

"The mornin' efter ye're mairried," continued Sandy, "jist lift up yer troosers afore ye pit them on, an' says you: 'Look here, Kate; there they are; wha's gaun to wear them—you or me?' Of course she'll blush, an' she'll say, 'Oh, you, Jamie; I wouldna hae onything to dae wi' them.' Well, keep her to the bargain. That's a' I've got to say. Here's to ye baith!" And Vallance emptied his glass amidst laughter and applause.

Jamie's intended father-in-law thoroughly enjoyed Sandy's advice, but added, with a shrewd shake of his head: "By gor', Jimmock, that's a' very well in its wey, but if Kate's like her mither ye'll no wear the troosers lang."

"Dae ye think so, Davit?" tartly interjected Jamie's father, leaning forward and peering into the former's face. "Let me tell ye this, auld man, that if Jamie's like his faither he'll lat nae woman wear his troosers. Only a muckle saftie wad aloo his wife to wear the troosers—an' that's up against ye, auld man!"

Davit Lee rose from his seat and made one slow, calculating step in the direction of old Jamie.

"I hope, Jamie Morrison, that ye dinna mean to say I'm a muckle saftie. Because if ye div, I can jist prove to ye in twa meenits that I'm as guid a man as you. See?" And Davit snapped his fingers in the other's face.

"Prove it, then!" roared Jamie, senior, making an effort to struggle to his feet, while his eyes began to dance angrily as he glared at his challenger.

But we saw that there was going to be trouble if we did not interfere at this stage, so two or three of us set about appeasing the wrath of old Davit, while young Jamie and Watty Anderson did their

best to mollify "Jimmock's" father, the son sternly ordering him to "sit down, ye auld fule, we're to hae nae fechtin' here; if ye maun fecht, gang outside an' dae't, an' no start barkin' in my hoose like a couple o' terrier dogs."

Peace was soon restored, and over another glass the old fellows shook hands and resumed their seats as if nothing had happened.

Then young Jamie made a speech. He was by no means dead sober, and I am afraid he enlarged upon certain aspects of his married life which he would have been wise to keep to himself. For instance, he went on, after enumerating all the good points of his future spouse, to remark that he would like it to be plainly understood that he was marrying her only, "an' no the hail Lee faimly." To this observation old Davit gave a half-hearted "hear, hear, Jamie!" but he rose once more to his feet when he heard his son-in-law to-be asserting that if any of that family interfered with him he would take prompt and decided measures of dealing with them—or words to that effect.

"Look here, Jimmock, ma lad!" broke in Davit, now speaking somewhat thickly and holding on to the armchair in which he had been sitting, "I wad like to ken exactly what ye mean! Neither the wife

nor me'll ever need onything aff ye, I hope, an' I must say that I dinna much care for the tone o' yer observations, young fella!"

"Nae herm meant, Davit!" hurriedly explained Jamie, "nae herm at a'! I only mean—well, I hope—at least, I don't think—Ach! ye a' ken fine what I mean! Sit doon on yer seat! Peter Purdie, gie the auld chap a dram!"

The dram served its purpose, and Jamie was allowed to continue. But the interruption had evidently unsettled him, for he went on in very rambling fashion to refer to future events and possibilities in his career as a family man which might have been very well left unhinted at.

"I hope the first yin's a lauddie, chaps, an' if it is I'll ca' him efter ma faither, there."

"Richt! Jamie," exclaimed old Morrison, joyfully flourishing a half-filled tumbler of beer. "Ye couldna ca' the wean efter a better man, tho' it's masel' that says it."

"And if the second yin's a lassie," went on young Jamie, "I'll ca' her efter ma mither, for she's——"

"Ye'll what?" roared Davit, springing to his feet. "Ye can ca' the first yin what ye like, Jimmock, but if the second yin's a lassie, I insist on the nam-in' o't being left to the wife's side o' the hoose. It's only fair, I tell ye, an' it'll be a scandal if ye dae

ony ither thing! I'm gaun hame, lads," he concluded. "I've had quite plenty o' this!"

"Ye're awfu' huffy, guid-faither," retorted Jimmie. "Ye wad think the bairns were yours. They're mine, an' I'll ca' them what I like that! an' that's to yer face!"

Gradually it began to dawn on some of us—especially those who had been confining their bibulations to lemonade and brown robin—that a quarrel on such a ludicrous subject was the height of stupidity, and Peter Purdie restored something like good humour to the situation by asking Jamie what he would "kirsten his bairns if he didna hae ony at a'."

"By gor'! Jimmock," laughed old Davit, once more subsiding into the armchair, "I never thocht o' that! We're a' countin' yer chickens afore they're hatched! But mind ye, when the second yin arrives—if ever it comes—I'll still haud to my opinion that the wife's side should hae the say in the namin' o't."

Big Sandy Vallance then made the harmony complete by expressing the hope that Jamie would soon be father of two fine boys. "In that case, Jamie," he went on, "ye should ca' them Rab Roy and Macbeth, an' that wad save a' trouble. Scotland for ever!"