

## CHAPTER VI.

Lassies, dinna sit an' pingle,  
 Stir your shanks, an' steer the ingle ;  
 Haste ye ! haste ye ! a' ye're able,  
 There's the plates, rin, set the table ;  
 Pour the tatties, redd the grate ;  
 Whisht, the clock stricks—losh we're late ;  
 There's your faither, blae wi' hunger,  
 Od, he'll eat us in his anger.

*Kitchen Rhyme.*

THE interesting and exciting nature of the foregoing conversation had deprived Time of his tedium, and, with an extra glass of Dowie's best, had kept the worthy trio nearly an hour behind that appointed for dinner. Accordingly, when they reached the jeweller's house they found his excellent sister out of all patience. The old lady had been a dozen times upstairs and downstairs, now inwardly chiding their delay, now loudly lamenting the overdone and fast cooling cockieleekie,



now peeping out at the door, and now resuming her seam, until, getting quite exhausted, she was once more on her way upstairs to examine the state of the dish, which she so justly prided herself in cooking to perfection, when she was arrested on the stairhead by the mingled sounds of the voices of her

expected guests, all talking loudly and laughing heartily. In another instant the bell tingling on the half-door announced that her brother and his two companions had entered the shop.

"Come awa, gentlemen, come awa," said she, as she looked down upon them. "Ay, Laird, I was sure ye were wi' them that they were staying sae lang; ye seldom think o' stirring out o' that howff until after your trysted time, and sae lang as ye hae onything to crack anent; ye neither hae mercy on my warm curiosity nor my cauld cockieleekie. But come awa, I'm e'en blythe to see ye a' thegither," she continued, as she extended her hand to Nairn, who was rather stiff and slow at creeping up the narrow stair; "ye maun just excuse my outspoken freedom, gudeman," she added, as she cordially shook hands with the Gaberlunzie; "ye are indeed welcome; had ye kenned how I hae been dreamin' and thinkin' about you and your story, ye wad hae been sooner here. Had it no been that I ne'er was within a public-house door a' my life, and that folk might be thinking I was beginning to look ower closely after my brother there—sae anxious was I to hear o' them ye were talkin' o'—that I believe I wad really hae joined ye in Johnnie Dowie's. But be seated; ye maun just mak the maist o' what I hae to gie ye, although ye'll no be muckle made up wi't. I'm vexed too that the room is in sic trim; we were washing this morning, and the lassie hasna gotten the house rightly redd up yet."

"Ye're aye makin' excuses about the house," said her brother, "when there's little necessity for't: you women bodies are aye sae particular an' nicknackity. Gin I may judge o' my neighbours' stamacks frae the state o' my ain, we're mair needfu' than nice at present; an' now," continued he, after saying grace, and supplying each with a plate of excellent cockieleekie, "just win too, and begin."

It is needless to state that my aunt's apology for the state of the house was unnecessary; so far as her guests could perceive, it was in first-rate order, while the quality of the fare she set before them was super-excellent.

No one, from looking at the exterior of the lath-and-plaster-looking erection in which this snug little party were now enjoying themselves, could have any idea of the tidiness and comfort which pervaded every corner of the interior. The sweet and sunny parlour in which they sat had all the appearance of

being my aunt's favourite apartment. It was filled with pleasing evidences of her careful industry and tasteful ingenuity. The ceiling was white as snow; the walls, which were lined with wooden panelling, were covered with a bright glossy green colour, they being regularly rubbed down every Monday morning, shone like a mirror; not a spot of dimness nor of dust was ever allowed to rest there for an instant; even the summer fly dared not seek a resting-place for his tiny trotters within the precincts of that hallowed apartment. Little elegant stands of flowers filled the breasts of the windows, and diffused rich fragrance, not only through the house, but at times through the Parliament Square. White semi-transparent window curtains, arranged in the French fashion, floated around in light and graceful folds. Numerous choice specimens of needlework, and bouquets of artificial flowers, all of my aunt's handiwork, were tastefully distributed through the room, some of the former being hung in small richly carved frames on the walls. The mantelpiece was loaded with specimens of South Sea shells, at that time very rare; and on the panel above, in the centre of a circle composed of peacock and ostrich feathers, and encased in a very rich gold frame of his own workmanship, hung a beautifully-executed miniature of my uncle in his robes of office. An old fashioned mirror lined the wall between the two windows; a circular mahogany table, inlaid in the top with some quaint representation of a convenery meeting, stood in the centre of the room; and a dozen of old fashioned, low seated, tall spiral-backed oaken chairs, completed the picture.

On the present occasion, it was evident that, notwithstanding my aunt's apology for being unprepared, she had bestowed considerable pains and attention both on herself and the entertainment. The servant girl, respecting whose appearance she was particularly anxious, was arrayed in her newest and neatest gown; and the tablecloth, dazzlingly white, and fresh from the fold, had the sweet scent of the gowany grass still upon it. The table was literally laden with massive silver-plate, knives, forks, and spoons being all of this valuable material. After the cloth had been removed, and each of the guests had swallowed more than one of my aunt's blessings, as her brother used to call her little-headed, tall-stalked glasses of brandy, the old lady, unable longer to restrain her curiosity, broke in upon the conversation with—

"Aweel, now, gudeman," addressing the Gaberlunzie, "before I gang down to the shop and leave you to enjoy yoursel's, ye'll maybe let me hear some o' the news ye hae brought about our auld freens and patrons. I'm sure ye canna say now that my curiosity has mastered my manners."

"Indeed it has not, madam," said Nairn; "and in this instance, as is usual with you, you have shown an example of patience, which your sex in general would do well to imitate. You well merit reward, and as this stranger and I have some little business which calls us away, and will detain us a short time, your brother will, I have no doubt, readily communicate to you the very agreeable news, which we have listened to with so much interest and delight, and for which we are indebted to this good man, whom I am proud to have the honour of ranking among my friends, although as yet I know not his name."

This unexpected address almost overcame the Gaberlunzie. At first he blushed, but quickly recovering himself, said, in his most familiar manner, "I neither desire nor deserve any other name than that which I derive frae my profession. I haena made enough yet by beggin' to pit me aboon my callin', and nae man should e'er think shame o' his business till he is able to live without it, or his business will soon think shame o' him. I'll aiblins find a better name when I get a better way o' keevin'. In the meantime, just ca' me the Gaberlunzie; but we maun awa to the White Hart, for I'll be sair missed by this time."

"Ay, that's right," said my uncle; "keep the dear lady in mind, and be sure ye bring her up till her four hours; faith we shall hae a night o't. It's no ilka day we hae sic honoured guests aneath our humble roof."

"Well," said Nairn, "we shall avail ourselves of your kind invitation; we will call round by the Mint on our way to the White Hart, and I shall cause my housekeeper to prepare a room for the reception of the fair stranger to-night. I am afraid Nanny will be thinking it rather ominous when I tell her to put the state bedroom in order for the reception of a lady and child. It'll put her in a sad quandary, poor bodie!"

"What!" exclaimed my aunt, in amazement, "ye're no gaun to tak a woman an' a wean hame to your house, Laird. Think ye what the neighbours wad say!"

"Let them say what they please," replied Nairn, smiling, "I care not. You at least, madam, will take my part, and, with

your countenance and assistance, they will have indeed evil tongues who dare indulge in unfounded calumnies on the subject. Your brother, madam," he added, "will let you understand the matter. In the meantime, good-bye."

There was a vague ambiguity about Nairn's way of expressing himself on this occasion, which puzzled my aunt exceedingly. She stood for nearly half-a-minute motionless; and it was not until the Laird was fairly out of sight and hearing that a new light appeared to dawn upon her benighted understanding. Her face assumed a quaint and curiously blended expression of humour and pathos, and she held up her hands, exclaiming, "Heh sirs, has it come to this at last; is the auld fool married?" Of this idea, however, she was speedily disabused by her brother, who briefly rehearsed to her the Gaberlunzie's story, which produced so strong an impression on her mind, and so much excited and interested her feelings, that, hurrying on her little bonnet, and throwing on her old-fashioned silk cloak, she instantly set off for the White Hart Inn, saying to her brother, "That although she ne'er had gane to a tavern seekin' him, she wadna hesitate to gang to an inn to ca' on a leddy." On reaching the White Hart Inn, she overtook the Laird and the Gaberlunzie, just as they were about to enter it, when the former, who by the way was not a little surprised to see her, gave her a humorous description of the agitated state into which he had thrown his housekeeper, by the intimation that he was about to bring a lady and child into the house.

Heralded by the Gaberlunzie, my aunt and Nairn were now ushered into the presence of the heiress of the Hepburn estate, whom they found dressed in the humble garb of a muirland farmer's wife, but with a manner that might have graced any station in life. My aunt and she were soon as intimate as if they had been acquainted for a lifetime. They looked like mother and daughter. The invitation to tea was as frankly accepted as it was warmly and cordially given, and the whole party set out on their way to the Parliament Square, my aunt leading the way, and carrying in her arms the rosy little child, who was already an established favourite.

Never within the precincts of the Parliament Square was there assembled a more snug and happy party than graced the tea-table in Miss Hepburn's pet parlour on that eventful evening. All were pleased and delighted. The appearance of the

fair young stranger with her infant charge had deeply interested all present in her favour. The recent death of her father had given to her countenance a slight tinge of melancholy, which was finely balanced by a sweet and well-regulated cheerfulness; and she was looked on with a mixture of admiration and respect, such as her good friends had never before entertained for any created being. They seemed also highly honoured by the trust reposed in them. Nairn looked on his fair relative as a daughter. My aunt pressed on her acceptance many little presents, the value of which ladies alone can duly estimate. My uncle kissed the rosy cheeks and lips of the chubby little girl, danced and played a hundred antics with her, brought up from the shop a silver rattle, and hung it round her neck, to the great delight of the merry little creature. The Gaberlunzie said little, but his bright eye gleamed still brighter, and he evidently felt that the scene before him was more than a recompense for all his exertions.

After tea, my uncle's old fashioned silver punch-bowl, a choice specimen of art, which had been presented to him by the Incorporation of Goldsmiths, was filled and emptied several times by the three social companions. The whole matter was talked over; every feasible project was eagerly snatched at; many plans were suggested; sly nods and knowing looks were exchanged; sudden thoughts flashed like lightning through all their brains, now somewhat illuminated by the spiritual essence extracted from the festive bowl. Unfortunately, however, for the credit of Bacchus, and the merit claimed for him by his votaries, my aunt, who was never known to drink of anything stronger than her own home-brewed beer, started the only practical plan which might be said to be the result of that night's deliberations. "Ay," said she, after listening attentively to a number of high-sounding and inflated notions, which she knew would evaporate with that which had called them forth; "ye may craw as crouselly as ye like here, and ye may gaur yoursel's believe that when ye rin out into the street wi' your hearts on fire, ye'll set a' the warld in a flame; but ye'll find that your everyday friends will rin frae ye to preserve themsel's, and your kindest anes throw cauld water on you. When ye need freends dinna let on, and they'll maybe help ye; a toom pouch is a cauld rife companion, and the man wha can help himsel' has aye a' the warld to assist him: for, as the auld rhyme says—

“O! weel we may ken ye,  
 An’ weel we may see ye;  
 But gin we’re speer’d to len’ ye,  
 Or askit to gie ye;  
 Come ye seekin’ e’en your ain,  
 We wad rather see ye gane.

“Gin ye want to find freen’s,  
 Promises may fee them;  
 But gin ye want to bind freen’s,  
 Guineas ye maun gie them;  
 Frozen heads and hearts are thow’d  
 By a spark o’ glittering gowd.

“O! auld gray heads are bow’d,  
 An’ young knees are bended,  
 Worshipping their god, gowd;  
 Shall this ne’er be mended?  
 Poor is he wha freen’ has nane,  
 Poorer he wha’s god is gain!

“Ay,” said the Gaberlunzie, “but whiles the siller’s sae scarce in some o’ the outlandish corners o’ the kintry, that ye canna find faut wi’ the bodies for ettling sair to get at the sunny side o’ the grit folks’ faces. An auld acquaintance o’ mine ance read his friends a lesson they winna soon forget. But I’ll sing ye the story in a sang; we’re a’ in the way of being merry, and there’s naething mair innocent than weel-timed daffin.”

### OUR BRAW UNCLE.

My auld uncle Willie cam doun here frae Lunnon,  
 An’ wow but he was a braw man;  
 An’ a’ my puir cousins around him cam rinnin’,  
 Frae mony a lang mile awa, man.  
 My uncle was rich, my uncle was proud—  
 He spak o’ his gear, and he bragg’d o’ his gowd;  
 An’ whate’er he hinted, the puir bodies vow’d  
 They wad mak it their love an’ their law, man.

He stay'd wi' them a' for a week time about,  
 Feastin', an' fuddlin', an' a', man,  
 Till he fairly had riddled the puir bodies out,  
 An' they thocht he was ne'er gaun awa, man.  
 And neither he was; he had naething to do,  
 He had made a' their fortunes and settled them too;  
 Though they ne'er saw a bodle, they'd naething to say,  
 For they thocht they wad soon hae it a', man.



But when our braw uncle had stay'd here a year,  
 I trow but he wasna a sma' man,  
 Their tables cam down to their auld hamilt cheer,  
 An' he gat himsel' book'd to gae 'wa, man.  
 Yet e'er the coach started, the hale o' his kin  
 Cam to the coach-door, maistly chokin' him in,  
 And they press'd on him presents o' a' they could fin',  
 An' he vow'd he had *done* for them a' man.

And sae had he too; for he never cam back.  
 My sang! but he wasna a raw man,  
 To feast for a year without paying a plack,  
 An' gang wi' sic presents awa, man.  
 An' aften he bragg'd how he cheated the greed  
 O' his gray gruppy kinsmen be-north o' the Tweed;  
 An' the best o't, when auld uncle Willie was dead,  
 He left them—*just naething awa, man.*



This song seemed to divert the subject of conversation into another channel for a time. But by-and-by it forced its way back into the old course, where again the three philosophers were completely thrown into the shade by the brilliancy of woman's wit.

"Od, Laird," said my aunt, after listening to their dreamy and now somewhat hazy plans, "ye should try and secure the good graces o' the powers that be;" and then, as if the idea had suddenly occurred to her, she exclaimed, "I have it! I have it! the city member is to be here soon to get himsel' re-elected. Now, Laird, get ye up a dinner and ball in your auld mansion-house. Invite him along wi' your auld cronies an' their successors in the Council. Prime your guns afore hand, and let the explosion gang off wi' some pith; then ne'er let on but the estate is for yoursel', and I'll wad ye a groat ye'll no be lang in gettin' something done in't."

"A good thought," said Nairn, "and it shall be immediately acted on; my young relative shall grace the ball with her presence, and her good friend here, the Gaberlunzie, shall accompany her."

"Na, na," said the Gaberlunzie, "lang ere that takes place, I maun hae her hame to her ain gudeman, wha'll be wearyin' sair enough for her. Besides, neither of us at present set a high value on such gaiety, and gin onything o' the present story was spunkin' out, it might defeat the very end ye are getting up the ball to accomplish."

"Well, there may be some truth in your remark," said Nairn; "so Aunt Matty shall herself act as matron, and we shall make the old Mint gay once more, as it was wont to be in the days of yore."

"Let me alane for that," said my aunt; "I'll warrant ye there hasna been a ploy in Edinburgh for an age at whilk there were sae mony anxious to get an invitation, as there will be on this occasion. Ask ye the gentlemen, an' leave the leddies to me."

"Indeed, I think it wad be wiserlike gin ye invited the men, and left the womankind to Nairn an' me," said my uncle.

"Gae wa, brither, think shame," retorted the old lady; "how could I tak upon me to invite men? Ye might as weel set me to seek a man for mysel'; a thing, however, after a', naewise uncommon for maidens come to my years. Invite ye

the men, and leave the lave to Nanny and me. I'll wager my lugs that our New Toun freends, wi' a' their upstart whigma-leeries o' balls and routes, shanna ding us. We'll gaur the auld Mint Close sparkle as brilliantly as Princes Street, an' gie them a spice o' what life was in my young days."

"Well, madam," said Nairn, "I shall leave the whole matter in your hands. Take your own way in everything. Spare no expense. Let us have a dinner fit to set before the city member, and a ball that will please our young friends. One thing, however, I am somewhat fastidious about: see that in engaging musicians you do not get fellows who either cannot, or will not, play Scotch reels, to my ear the finest of all dancing music. I cannot for my part wag a step to your Italian fiddle-de-dees. Would to Heaven we had the poor organist!"

"Amen," ejaculated the Gaberlunzie.

"His fiddling to my mind was the perfection of playing," concluded Nairn.

"Ay," said my aunt, "but it's no likely he'll come in your way so soon. However, I shanna engage ane till I hae heard wi' my ain lugs what he can do; the grass shanna grow at my heels till we hae a' thing in order. Watty, ye maun tak care and butter the member and the Council weel, and gaur them promise something that will gie us a grup o' them. An' now that matters are nearly arranged, I shall accompany my young friend home to her residence, and you can follow us at leisure. Good-night!" And truly at leisure they did follow, for it was cock-crow before they concluded their sederunt.

On leaving the party my aunt conducted the fair stranger to Nairn's house, and consigned her over to the charge of his faithful and attached domestic, old Nanny, a personage of no small importance in her own estimation, and one who entertained a most exalted idea of her master's dignity. She had grown gray in his service, was careful and saving in the expenditure of his means, and took all the charge and trouble of house-keeping on her own shoulders. Nanny was generally dressed in a plainer manner than most bachelors' housekeepers; she wore her gray hair arranged in little curls, while a broad and clear bordered cap, with long lappets, and a black ribbon pinned on the outside, girded her face like a bonnet. Her gowns, which were all composed of substantial homespun stuff,

were somewhat emblematic of her character, both in their make and texture. No stays marred the proportions of her bust; no whalebone shoulder-pieces pinned down her arms to her sides; and even when dressed out on gala days she felt no difficulty in tucking up her sleeves, girding up her gown tail, and bearing a hand in her favourite occupation of *redding up*. Nanny had her weaknesses, however, one of which was her sometimes rather vain-gloriously and ostentatiously displaying the huge bunch of keys attached to her girdle, which was rather more frequently than was absolutely necessary seen dangling on the outside of her pocket-hole. In the house, except on great occasions, she was generally to be found in a short-gown and a wide circular apron; for Nanny was a servant of all work as well as housekeeper, and kept the Laird's house in a very tidy and comfortable state. Her master, who was easy in circumstances, and as easy in disposition, gave himself little trouble about the outlays required in housekeeping. Whether this was the cause of, or was caused by, Nanny's carefulness, is a matter of minor importance; but certain it is, that she exhibited in all her accounts the strictest regard to economy, and gave a most edifying, though somewhat lengthy, detail of all her intromissions. Each evening every little item was regularly entered, halfpenny for halfpenny. With her the baker required to keep no *nickstick*, the butcher no chalk-board; and were it not for wearying out the patience of some of my readers, I would certainly lay before them a few extracts from her cash-book, which might, perhaps, furnish useful hints to some of my careful friends in these days of economy and retrenchment.

It was to the care of this worthy creature that the fair young stranger and her infant charge were now consigned; and their appearance which had commanded the admiration of my discerning and sagacious aunt, must have told with double effect on the homely and unsophisticated Nanny. When my aunt, who was so far communicative, informed her that the lady was a distant relative of Nairn's, Nanny muttered that "it was queer, for as lang as she had lived in her master's service, she ne'er had heard him mention that he had ae livin' relation." A few days, however, made them all thoroughly acquainted, and Matty and Nanny by turns did their best to honour their fair guest with every mark of respect and attention—kindness which was on her part returned with gratitude and affection.