

## The Minister's Fiddle.

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IN a small, northern, inland, lazy, sleepy, self-satisfied Scottish town, lived John and Tammas, weavers by profession; aprons round their waists; fond o' snuff; in the days when the snuff mill was used as the pipe is now.

"Tak' a snuff, Tammas? Onything new?" "No." "Nae-thing ava?" "No."

Now Tammas was the gossip of the place, the man that knew everything first in the town, and folks sometimes said he kened things afore they happened.

"Eh! man stop or I mind! Weel, I'll just mention a circumstance that came to my knowledge yesterday. As I was gaun doun the street, a when wives were fillin' their pigs at the well. I couldna help noticin' that they were a' Baptist bodies an' dissentin' trash, an' they were speakin' about *oor* minister, and said ane to the ither, 'No!' 'Eh, preserve me, have ye no heard? Folks are sayin' that the fiddle gangs frae morning till nicht in the parish minister's hoose.' Weel, when I heard that, I could'na help sayin' to mysel' a' last nicht, I wonder if there was less fiddlin' in the manse if there wad be ony mair pith into the poopit."

"Capital," says John, "capital, guid mornin', guid mornin'," and away went the old man to his cronies and told them the pungent saying of Tammas, and they came to the general opinion that something must be done to prevent the parish kirk becoming a byword and a reproach. So the Session at last met informally, and decided that it was their duty to expostulate with the minister, and John and Tammas were

appointed a deputation for that purpose. He heard of their coming—a minister has lang ears—and was prepared for them. The deputation came to the door of the manse confident of their success, and were met at the door by the minister. "How's a' wi' ye, Tammas? How are ye to-day, John?" "We're quite well, sir," said they, bowing stiffly, with all the dignity of "offeelial" persons. John, who was the spokesman, cleared his voice and began, "Sir, the Session appointed me and Tammas a deppytation to ca' upon you to say—" "Ye manna stand at the door and speak, come awa' in. Sit doon there, Tammas."

"I canna sit there! that's yer ain chair."

"All the chairs in the house are mine, but that's my study chair. If ye sit there lang enough Tammas, ye'll maybe be able to mak' sermons yersel'!"

John felt that he must begin at once, but he soon discovered that it is one thing to be appointed "a deputation" and another thing to do its business. His "mull" was in his hand, and he tapped it as if his brains were in it. "Weel," as I said, "the Session appinted Tammas and me—me and Tammas—a deppytation to ca' upon you an' say that—that we were appinted, Tammas an' me, a deppytation—that the Session met an' appinted Tammas an' me to wait upon ye, sir, an' say that—that— *Wull ye tak a snuff, sir?*"

"Oh, yes. I'm very fond of snuff, and speaking of snuff puts me in mind of a man that sleeps in the seat with you on Sabbath. Would you kindly give him a pinch of your best snuff to keep him awake."

"I'll dae that, sir," says John, "I'll dae that. But dae ye no think it wad be a gude thing if ye wad put a pinch o' snuff into your sermon?"

"What's the matter wi' my sermons, John? Are ye no pleased wi' my sermons?"

"Oh, yes," said John, "I'm rale weel pleased wi' your sermons—they're getting better and better every Sabbath."

"In what respect?"

"They're gettin' shorter and shorter, sir."

"Ah, John! ye're gettin' fond o' yer joke," and the minister showed his common sense, by laughing with others, at his own expense.

"Guidwife! is the tea ready? we will have oor tea and a crack." After the tea in those days came the toddy. They talked of everything *except* the fiddle; and after a glass or two the minister said, "I must tell you that I have been spending a good deal of my spare time lately learning some fine old Scottish tunes, 'The Land o' the Leal,' 'John Anderson my Jo,' 'Auld Robin Gray'——"

"Eh!" cried John, "that's my favourite tune! There's just twa Scots tunes I'm fond o', 'Auld Robin Gray,' and the 'Auld Hunder.'"

"But the Old Hundred's not a Scottish tune."

"Is't no! I thocht there was naebody but Scots folk could mak' tunes."

"Ah na, John, ye're wrang there! It's a German tune."

"*A German Tune!!* I thocht thae German bodies could mak' naething but sausages."

"Perhaps you would like to hear me playing these tunes?"

"Certainly," says John, "certainly! Bring forth the fiddle!"

Forth came the fiddle—a huge bass fiddle—and the clergyman played some tunes with exquisite taste and feeling. The two men, as they ought to have been, were charmed—for, though elders of the kirk, they were still human beings.

"Eh! we never heard sic grand music a' our lives. We ay kent ye were the best preacher in a' the country side, but noo we ken ye're the best fiddler," and as often as he played, they praised. At last they shook hands and parted, and homewards the deputation went, after thanking him for his tea, and toddy, and tunes.

John was in high fettle, for he was pleased with himself. "Tamma! I'm the boy for the clergy. Ye'll no catch me sayin' onything ahint their back that I canna say afore their face; the sermons will be a quarter o' an hour shorter, an' ye'll see that what I told him about the f——"

"Are'na we twa born idiots—sent to argue against the fiddle,

and here we've sat an' fiddled an' fuddled the whole nicht. We'll be a lauchin'-stock to the whole congregation."

Homeward they went, sad and silent, till they came to John's door, when he suddenly stopped (and slapped his leg and said)—

"Eh, Tammas, I see daylight through'd nool! Oor minister's perfectly justified in playin' on a fiddle like *yon*. Yon's nane o' yer sinfu' screechin' penny waddin' fiddles that blind fiddlers scart upon for bawbees—No! Yon's a respectable fiddle—yon's a substantial fiddle—yon's a *releegious* fiddle!!