

"Neyer was the like of him for that matter," answered the honest dame. "But to see the malice of men! Some of thae land-loopers and gillflirts down at the filthy puddle yonder, that they ca' the Waal, had heard of this puer lad, and the bits of pictures that he made fashion of drawing, an' they maun cuttle him awa down to the hottle, where mony a bonnie story they had cleecked, Mr. Bindloose, baith of Mr. Tirl and of myself."

"A Commissary Court business," said the writer, going off again upon a false scent. "I shall trim their jack-s for them, Mrs. Dods, if you can but bring tight evidence of the facts.—I will soon bring them to fine and palinode—I will make them repent meddling with your good name."

"My gude name! What the sorrow is the matter wi' my name, Mr. Bindloose? I think ye hae been at the wee cappie this morning, for as early as it is—My gude name!—if onybody touched my gude name, I would neither fash counsel nor com-missary—I wad be down among them like a jer-falcon among a wheen wild geese, and the best among them that dared to say onything of Meg Dods bye what was honest and civil, I wad sune see if her cockernonie was made of her ain hair or other folks. My gude name, indeed!"

"Weel, weel, (Mrs. Dods, I was mista'en, that's a'," said the writer, "I was mista'en; and I dare to say you would haud your ain wi' your neighbours as weel as any woman in the land.—But let us hear now what the grief is in one word."

"In one word, then, Clerk Bindgoose, it is little short of—murder," said Meg in a low tone, as if the very utterance of the word startled her.

"Murder—murder, Mrs. Dods—it cannot be—there is not a word of it in the Sheriff-office—there could not be murder in the country, and me not hear of it—for God's sake, take heed what you say, woman, and dinna get yourself into trouble."

"Mr. Bindloose, I can but speak according to my lights," said Mrs. Dods; "you are in a sense a judge in Israel, at least you are one of the scribes having authority—and I tell you, with a wae and bitter heart, that this puir callant of mine that was lodging in my house has been murdered or kidnapp'd awa' among thae banditti folk down at the New Waal; and I'll have the law put in force against them, if it should cost me a hundred pounds."

The Clerk stood much astonished at the nature of Meg's accusation, and the pertinacity with which she seemed disposed to insist upon it.

"I have this comfort," she continued, "that whatever has happened, it has been by no fault of mine, Mr. Bindloose; for weel I wot, before that blood-thirsty auld half-pay Philistine, Mac Turk, got to speech of him, I clawed his cantle to some purpose with my heath-busom.—But the poor simple bairn himsel, that had nae mair knowledge of the wickedness of human nature than a calf has of a fletcher's gully, he threappit to see the auld hardened blood-shedder, and trysted wi' him to meet wi' some of the gang at an hour certain the neist day, and awa he gaed to keep tryste, but since that hour naebody ever has set een on him.—And the man-sworn villains now want to put a disgrace on him, and say that he fled the country rather than face them! a likely story—fled the country for them!—and leave his bill unsettled—him that was sae regular...and his portmanteau and his fishing-rod, and the pencils and pictures he held sic a wark about!—It's my faithful belief, Mr. Bindloose—and ye may trust me or no as ye like—that he had some foul play between the Cleikum and the Buckstane. I have thought it, and I have dreamed it, and I will be at the bottom of it, or my name is not Meg Dods, and that I wad have them a' to reckon on.—Ay, ay, that is right, Mr. Bindloose, tak out your pen and ink-horn, and let us set about it to purpose."

The following dialogue between Lawyer Bindloose, Meg Dods and an eccentric old Nabob named Touchwood, exhibits a comparison of past times with the present. At the same time it evinces one strong characteristic of this author, namely his never alluding to the practices and customs of old times without indulging in a satirical remark on those of the present.

"But at any rate, if you knew this country formerly, ye cannot but be marvellously pleased with the change we have been making since the American war—hill-sides