

IS KISSING BRIBERY?

A Scotch Election Story.

The MacWhittle, of Whittlemuir, was not, as every one knows, a rich man when he left his native town of Fashkirk some thirty years ago to seek his fortune in Australia, but he was uncommonly well off when he returned about two years since and announced his intention of contesting Fashkirk at the next election. He had bought the estate of old Lord Whinanbeg, whose shepherd he had been in the days of auld lang syne, before the noble Lord had taken to speculating in Turkish bonds, and he had brought with him from the gold diggings a hearty, sunburnt Irish wife, and jovial troop of crown-up sons and daughters.

The sitting member for Fashkirk was at that time another MacWhittle, who called himself the only genuine MacWhittle, and hastened to denounce his new clansman from Australia as a spurious imitation. Lord Whinanbeg, however, who was chief of a young branch of the MacWhittles; naturally gave his preference to the Australian Mac; so that the MacWhittle who sat for Fashkirk had his nose put altogether out of joint. What is worse, many of the pious folks in the town accused the good man of having lied to them (or told them lies), in having so long palmed himself off as the only MacWhittle; the truth being that MacWhittle, M.P., was rather prudent with his money, whereas the ex-Australian scattered his about in regular hand-fuls, like corn-seed from which the sower expects a good crop. It soon became evident that the new MacWhittle would carry everything before him at the polls, and so the event proved, for when Parliament was unexpectedly dissolved in the spring of the present year, the new MacWhittle wrested the seat from his rival by a majority of about a hundred votes.

But thereupon the elder MacWhittle was wroth, and vowed that the election had been won by "corruption and bribery." He filed a petition; and in due course a brace of judges came down in state to try the same in the little Justice Court of Fashkirk. Now these judges were both very hard-headed, austere men, with no taste for joking and no grasp of humor. The senior one, old Lord Drapinthee, occasionally indulged in a glass of whiskey after dining in convivial company, and would smile under the influence of this potentia, but he never smiled at other times. The junior one, Lord MacPepperwraith, was a hot, pimply, peppery, fidgety judge, who was popularly believed not to have a best point. He lived on cold water and vegetables; was a member of the Free Kirk, whose services he regularly attended, and hanned all the amusements and pastimes of the earth, even to smoking, as temptations of the De'il. It seemed that with such judges as these the new MacWhittle must come off badly, if he really had any acts of bribery on his conscience; and his agent looked, in truth, very uncomfortable as he stepped into the witness box.

This agent, a gentleman named Crewke, was, however, a lawyer, and quite as sharp as either of the two judges. He fenced off every question put to him by the answer that he had received orders from his principal not to bribe, that he had not bribed, and that his conscience made him abhor bribery. As to the canvassing, it had almost all been done by the MacWhittle's daughters—"braw, bonnie lasses, my lads, who had no need to carry money about them when they went buying votes."

"How can you buy anything without money, sir?" inquired Lord Drapinthee, sternly.

"You might give an equivalent, my lads," answered Mr. Crewke.

"A cheque for instance," suggested Lord MacPepperwraith.

"No, something nicer, my lads."

"What can be nicer than cheques?" asked Lord Drapinthee, in solemn bewilderment.

"Anyhow, a vote bought is a vote illegally obtained," remarked the counsel for the petitioner.

"I didn't mean to use the word buy; I should have said 'procure,'" explained Mr. Crewke.

"Why do you say things you don't mean, sir?" asked Lord MacPepperwraith, indignantly.

Mr. Crewke stammered an apology, and suggested that it would be well to call the Misses MacWhittle, and let them answer for themselves. He was informed that he need not trouble himself to suggest things, as the judges knew what their business was better than he did. Mr. Crewke thereupon stepped lamely out of the box and the usher of the Court called in loud tones for Miss MacWhittle.

That damsel forthwith appeared in a costume which dazzled the eye of the beholder. She had a jersey of cherry silk, a skirt of crimson satin, banded up with gold and straw-colored gloves with twelve buttons and a hat of white feathers with a white feather almost a yard long. But you should have seen the light of her eyes, the dimples of her cheeks, and the smile of her small mouth. These beauties of her costume all to nothing.

"Torn yer face this way, please," said Lord Drapinthee, adjusting his spectacles to get a better view. Miss MacWhittle turned the glory of her countenance full on him, and the judge collapsed, saying meekly, "Ye'll tell the whole truth, noo, I'm a're."

"Ou, ai, ye'll hear the full truth frae me," said the young lady, calmly. "I've writ on a piece of paper all the kisses I gave to the folks in Fashkirk to buy votes for father, and my seesters they've doon the same."

"Kusses?" chorussed the two judges.

"Did ye say kusses?"

"Yes, things like this," laughed Miss MacWhittle, as she blew a kiss towards Lord MacPepperwraith, making that worthy's ears turn red hot.

"Go ain, Miss," said his lordship, in a choking tone, while there was an audible titter in the court.

"Aweel, my seesters and I just kissed the whole town, I do believe," continued Miss MacWhittle, archly. "We meant father should be elected, and he was elected as ye well ken. Noo shall I read out my list to ye?" continued the damsel, smiling. "First, there were the Pravost."

"Stop!" exclaimed that worshipful and blushing magistrate, who was installed on the bench in his chain and robe.

"Stop, please."

"Sto. My lud, is this evidence?" interposed the counsel for the petitioner, who was the son-in-law.

"Aweel, ye called this witness yer sell," responded Lord Drapinthee.

"No, I've had enough of these young leddies," exclaimed the counsel, amid general merriment. "I'd rather call the defendant's sons," and he called Dugald MacWhittle, the new M. P.'s first-born.

This young gentleman, on stepping into the witness-box amid general excitement, created an impression almost as favourable as that which his sister had produced; indeed it was more favorable so far as the female part of the audience was concerned, though some of the barristers noticed that a few of the Fashkirk dames who had been accommodated with seats on the Bench fidgetted rather uneasily when the handsome laddie kissed the book. Dugald was a young fellow of twenty-two, who was just then holding a commission in the militia preparatory to getting one in the dragoons. He had a frank, cheerful face, and eyes which sparkled like sapphires. "You will tell the whole truth, if you please," said the petitioning counsel, endeavoring to browbeat him.

"It shall be as you please," retorted Dugald, smiling; and he, too, like his sister, drew out a list.

"What have you been up to the kissing game, to?" inquired the counsel, in disgust; but as the time for his cross-questioning had not come, he waved his hand as though to intimate that he would demolish this witness when the other counsel had done with him.

"So that is a list of the ladies on whom you bestowed kisses, Mr. MacWhittle?" said the counsel for the defence, breezily.

"Would you oblige us by reading it?"

"I would much rather not," laughed Dugald. Lord Drapinthee, puzzled.

"Your own tastes are not to be consulted here, sir."

"Never mind, my lad; I will not press the question, and I have nothing more to ask of this witness," said the counsel for the defence; whereupon the other counsel arose, looking very fierce, and was about to speak when one of the ladies on the bench uttered a piteous sort of squeal and fainted. Now this lady was none other than the counsel's own wife, wherefore the learned gentleman remained for a moment with his mouth open, unable to utter a word till a length he faltered:—

"That's enough, sir. My lud, my case is completed. As this witness has confessed to procuring votes by illicit means I will not waste the time of the Court further."

"And I will not waste it either by making an unmeaning speech," observed the other counsel, rising. "I contend that the petitioner has failed to produce any evidence that will hold water. Kissing is not bribery."

"Wla told ye that, sir?" asked Lord MacPepperwraith, severely. "We'll give our judgment by-and-by."

So saying, the two judges swept out of Court and retired to their private room, leaving the audience to laugh and crack jokes over the curiously novel testimony that had been tendered. But when the judges were alone they looked at each other in a rather benighted fashion, and by way of clearing their thoughts, took off their wigs. Then they doffed their gowns and sat down to a table on which were set wine, water and biscuits. Lord Drapinthee helped himself to a glass of sherry, Lord MacPepperwraith gulped down a glass of water, and then the latter said emphatically, "Of course, kissing is bribery."

"Aweel, I doubt it," responded the other. "To constitute a bribe there must, I take it, be a tender of some object of specific value. Noo, how would you value a kuss?"

"I wouldna value it at all if not given me by a member of my own familie," rejoined Lord MacPepperwraith, whose

propriety was scandalized.

"Ye wouldna be coaxed out of your vote by it if a braw wench like that MacWhittle girl gave it ye?"

"Certainly not; but maybe there are others less scrupulous than meeself, so the argument does not apply," affirmed Lord MacPepperwraith.

The other judge looked embarrassed, and began a disquisition on the subject of specific valuables, in which he sought to establish the rates of exchange (as it were) of kisses, smiles, and other handshaking.

He asked whether a kiss could be valued at a guinea, a sapphire, or a penny? He argued that the more kisses there were given so much the less was their value and as the MacWhittle girls and boys had kissed the whole town, their osculations could hardly be regarded as things of much worth. Then he ended by putting this pertinent question:—Now if you, Brother MacPepperwraith, were to kuss the whole town of Fashkirk—

"I wouldna do it," answered His Lordship angrily.

"But for argument's sake, suppose ye did? Do ye think this proceeding would be valued as much as if ye did some other nice thing? What I am trying to prove is this, that kusses partake of the nature of those airy promises made in electoral speeches, of which candidates are never chary, and which have a value according to the receiver's taste for them."

"Aweel then they constitute undue influence," exclaimed Lord MacPepperwraith, abandoning his first line of intrenchments and taking to a second.

"As a shake of the hands undue influence?" asked Lord Drapinthee, following him up.

"What d' ye mean, mon?" asked Lord MacPepperwraith, startled by the unmasking of this new battery.

"Why, mon, I remember," said the other judge, with his usual smileless gravity. "I remember that when ye were a candidate for Weebies ye shook hands wi' a tinker and a sweep, and kussed the baby of an organ grinder. Waur this undue influence."

"Oh, Donald, tist' kind of ye to recall the backslidings of my youth," ejaculated Lord MacPepperwraith, drawing his handkerchief across his eyes as if from emotion. The fact is, the old fellow had passed his sixtieth year when he stood for Weebies, and his conscience smote him.

"I—I—don't think it was right of me to kuss the organ-grinder's baby, and Heaven punished me, for I didna get elected."

"Aweel I willna boast over ye, Fergus," said Lord Drapinthee, kindly. "I should be glad to dispose of this kissing business I know that among the lasses whom Donald MacWhittle kussed was my own daughter, Meggie, who came afterwards and kussed my brother, who's landowner in Fashkirk, and voted, as I think, for the MacWhittle, and to tell the truth, I believe that Donald MacWhittle will end by marrying my Meggie."

"Aweel, it's not a case of conscience, then, but one of law," remarked Lord MacPepperwraith, shaking his colleague's hand; and he was so much upset that he drank a whole tumbler of sherry by mistake instead of a glass of water. "Look ye, mon," stammered he at length, "I'm of your opinion; kissing isn't bribery."

"Nor undue influence," said Lord Drapinthee; "it's like handshaking—nae mair."

"As ye please," answered Lord MacPepperwraith, who had sunk back in his chair with a happy look on his face, for he had not touched sherry for more than ten years. "I—I shook that sweep's hand, and had soot on me fingers, but Heaven punished me, ye know I didna get elected!"

There were a great many solicitors—or writers to the signet, to use the correct term—gathered in Court when the judgment on the Fashkirk Election Petition was pronounced, for this judgment involved a grave point of law—namely, as to whether kissing was bribery.

You could have heard a pin drop, as Lord MacPepperwraith, pronouncing judgment, declared that the defendant was duly seated and that the petition was dismissed with full costs against the petitioner. "Solvatur risu tabule," said his lordship, in conclusion. "Kissing is a thing to be laughed at; it doth not partake of the nature of corruption."

So it is a law in Scotland at present, and will remain so for evermore, let us trust, that a pretty woman who kisses an elector does not bribe, and uses no undue influence.

A man named Chas. Boyd tried to shoot his unfaithful wife at Belleville. He did not succeed.

A half-witted old man named Jacob Miller better known around Berlin as "Old Jolek," was run over and killed on the Grand Trunk Railway, near Breslau, last Thursday morning.

The Freeman's Chronicle, published at London, Eng. has expressed its opinion that "one of the most noteworthy characteristics of the craft in the United States" is "the tendency which is there so conspicuous in the direction of showing preference to substantial work. Being brought to task, it reiterates the opinion, and cites the Templar's display at Chicago and the costly temples throughout the continent in support of its views.

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