

Bailio proceeded to narrate the story of his fortunes, after the following fashion :

THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE SALE BY AUCTION.

I speak within bounds when I assert [said my nephew-in-law] that since the building of the primary house of Peterhead, no one ever gave occasion to a greater amount of gossiping speculation amongst the quidnuncs of that ancient burgh, than my grand-uncle Mungo McMurrich. He was generally the leading topic of conversation to the lieges when nothing in the shape of a murder or meal mob was furnished by Providence to give a zest to the insipidity of every day life, and considered in this point of view he might be regarded as a most notable public benefactor. There was a delicious mystery about the honest man which was inexpressibly appetizing to that numerous class, who having no particular business of their own to attend to, charitably occupy themselves with the affairs of their neighbours. Whenever he walked abroad the garret windows of all the adjacent elderly maidens were thrown wide open, in order that his pilgrimages might be duly traced, and as he threaded his way along the streets, business became suspended by universal consent so long as he was in sight.

Mungo McMurrich had left Peterhead when but a striding, in consequence of some dispute with his kinsfolk, and no one knew with any degree of certainty where his lot had been cast during the succeeding three quarters of a century. There was a report current, indeed, that having gone to London he had become a literature man,—but what that meant I never could precisely learn. So far as I could gather I came to the conclusion that it had something to do with the Calendar business, or perchance the manufacture of cheese, seeing that once he had been heard to say that he prepared articles for the press! Be this as it may he had returned when more than seventy winters had passed over his head, to let the remnant of his candle burn out in his native place, with the habit and repute of having a mint of wealth exceeding that of Lord Aberdeen himself, who previously had been reckoned the richest man in these parts.

Though I would fain speak with all befitting respect of my venerable ancestor, stern truth constrains me to say that his outward man was somewhat lacking in the attributes of

dignity and grace. In fact the fastidious would probably have spoken of him as being positively ugly. He was a little smoke-dried body, with legs which when his heels kissed each other formed a complete circle. Vulgarly speaking they would have been characterised as bowly. Concerning his nose it belonged to the class called snub,—and his mouth exhibited a brace of gigantic buck teeth, which developed themselves to the public even when his lips were closed. The costume of my grand-uncle was religiously that of the older school. Regularly every morning was his white head dusted with white powder, a tie long as the tail of a monkey reached from his neck to the small of his back—his coat was cut away at the sides, and presented sleeves capacious enough to have held a peck of meal—velveteen knee breeches protected his limbs from the vicissitudes of the elements, and his shoes exhibited steel buckles, gigantic as oyster shells, or tea saucers. To complete the picture, I may mention that my relative was the greatest consumer of pulverized tobacco that the oldest inhabitant ever recollected to have met with, and that you know is a big word in Scotland. His upper lip was constantly garnished with an ounce or two of the stimulating dust, and I have heard Thomas Twist the tobaccoconist affirm, that though the United Secession minister, the savoury Walter Dunlop, liked a pinch as weel's his neighbours, yet that Maister Mungo would snuff more in a week than he would in a month.

Far be it from me to affirm that it was beyond the bounds of possibility that Romeo bore a marked resemblance to my esteemed predecessor. This, however, I will assert without fear of contradiction, that if such was the case, the circumstance of Juliet's dying for love of him, is wonderful beyond all created comprehension.

Having said so much concerning the person of my grand-uncle, I may add a few words relative to his dwelling. It was an ancient tenement which had seen better days, and bore a character far from orthodox. Many years before, a man had hanged himself in one of the rooms thereof, and as a matter of course his ghost continued to frequent a locality so pregnant with agreeable associations. Prejudiced people made this fact a ground of objection to the house, and for a long period its