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The House with the Green Shutters

BY

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ELEVENTH IMPRESSION

TO

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THE HOUSE WITH THE GREEN SHUTTERS

I

THE frowsy chamber-maid of the "Red Lion" had just finished washing the front door steps. She rose from her stooping posture, and, being of slovenly habit, flung the water from her pail, straight out, without moving from where she stood. The smooth round arch of the falling water glistened for a moment in mid-air. John Gourlay, standing in front of his new house at the head of the brae, could hear the swash of it when it fell. The morning was of perfect stillness.

The hands of the clock across "the Square" were pointing to the hour of eight. They were yellow in the sun.

Blowsalinda, of the Red Lion, picked up the big bass that usually lay within the porch and, carrying it clumsily against her breast, moved off round the corner of the public house, her petticoat gaping behind. Halfway she met the ostler with whom she stopped in amorous dalliance. He said something to her, and she laughed loudly and vacantly. The silly *tee-hee* echoed up the street.

A moment later a cloud of dust drifting round the corner, and floating white in the still air, shewed that she was pounding the bass against the end of the house.

All over the little town the women of Barbie were equally busy with their steps and door-mats. There was scarce a man to be seen either in the Square, at the top of which Gourlay stood, or in the long street descending from its near corner. The men were at work; the children had not yet appeared; the women were busy with their household cares.

The freshness of the air, the smoke rising thin and far above the red chimneys, the sunshine glistering on the roofs and gables, the rosy clearness of everything beneath the dawn, above all the quietness and peace, made Barbie, usually so poor to see, a very pleasant place to look down at on a summer morning. At this hour there was an unfamiliar delicacy in the familiar scene, a freshness and purity of aspect—almost an unearthliness—as though you viewed it through a crystal dream. But it was not the beauty of the hour that kept Gourlay musing at his gate. He was dead to the fairness of the scene, even while the fact of its presence there before him wove most subtly with his mood. He smoked in silent enjoyment because on a morning such as this, everything he saw was a delicate flattery to his pride. At the beginning of a new day to look down on the petty burgh in which he was the greatest man, filled all his being with a consciousness of importance. His sense of prosperity was soothing and pervasive; he felt it all round him like the pleasant air, as real as that and as subtle; bathing him, caressing. It was the most secret and intimate joy of his life to go out and smoke on summer mornings by his big gate, musing over Barbie ere he possessed it with his merchandise.

He had growled at the quarry carters for being late in

setting out this morning (for like most resolute dullards he was sternly methodical), but in his heart he was secretly pleased. The needs of his business were so various that his men could rarely start at the same hour, and in the same direction. To-day, however, because of the delay, all his carts would go streaming through the town together, and that brave pomp would be a slap in the face to his enemies. "I'll shew them," he thought, proudly. "Them" was the town-folk, and what he would shew them was what a big man he was. For, like most scorners of the world's opinion, Gourlay was its slave, and shewed his subjection to the popular estimate by his anxiety to flout it. He was not great enough for the carelessness of perfect scorn.

Through the big green gate behind him came the sound of carts being loaded for the day. A horse, weary of standing idle between the shafts, kicked ceaselessly and steadily against the ground with one impatient hinder foot, clink, clink, clink upon the paved yard. "Easy, damn ye; ye'll smash the bricks!" came a voice. Then there was the smart slap of an open hand on a sleek neck, a quick start, and the rattle of chains as the horse quivered to the blow.

"Run a white tarpaulin across the cheese, Jock, to keep them frae melting in the heat," came another voice. "And canny on the top there wi' thae big feet o' yours; d'ye think a cheese was made for *you* to dance on wi' your mighty brogues?" Then the voice sank to the hoarse warning whisper of impatience; loudish in anxiety, yet throaty from fear of being heard. "Hurry up, man—hurry up, or he'll be down on us like bleezes for being so late in getting off!"

Gourlay smiled, grimly, and a black gleam shot from his eye as he glanced round to the gate and caught the words. His men did not know he could hear them.

The clock across the Square struck the hour, eight soft slow strokes, that melted away in the beauty of the morning. Five minutes passed. Gourlay turned his head to listen, but no further sound came from the yard. He walked to the green gate, his slippers making no noise.

"Are ye sleeping, my pretty men?" he said, softly. . . . "*Eih?*"

The "*Eih*" leapt like a sword, with a slicing sharpness in its tone, that made it a sinister contrast to the first sweet question to his "pretty men." "*Eih?*" he said again, and stared with open mouth and fierce dark eyes.

"Hurry up, Peter," whispered the gaffer, "hurry up, for Godsake. He has the black glower in his e'en."

"Ready, sir; ready now!" cried Peter Riney, running out to open the other half of the gate. Peter was a wizened little man, with a sandy fringe of beard beneath his chin, a wart on the end of his long, slanting-out nose, light blue eyes, and bushy eyebrows of a reddish gray. The bearded red brows, close above the pale blueness of his eyes, made them more vivid by contrast; they were like pools of blue light amid the brownness of his face. Peter always ran about his work with eager alacrity. A simple and willing old man, he affected the quick readiness of youth to atone for his insignificance.

"Hup horse; hup then!" cried courageous Peter, walking backwards with curved body through the gate,

and tugging at the reins of a horse the feet of which struck sparks from the paved ground as they stressed painfully on edge to get weigh on the great waggon behind. The cart rolled through, then another, and another, till twelve of them had passed. Gourlay stood aside to watch them. All the horses were brown; "he makes a point of that," the neighbours would have told you. As each horse passed the gate the driver left its head, and took his place by the wheel, cracking his whip, with many a "hup horse; yean horse; woa lad; steady!"

In a dull little country town the passing of a single cart is an event, and a gig is followed with the eye till it disappears. Anything is welcome that breaks the long monotony of the hours, and suggests a topic for the evening's talk. "Any news?" a body will gravely enquire; "Ou aye," another will answer with equal gravity, "I saw Kennedy's gig going past in the forenoon." "Aye, man, where would *he* be off till? He's owre often in his gig, I'm thinking—" and then Kennedy and his affairs will last them till bedtime.

Thus the appearance of Gourlay's carts woke Barbie from its morning lethargy. The smith came out in his leather apron, shoving back, as he gazed, the grimy cap from his white-sweating brow; bowed old men stood in front of their doorways, leaning with one hand on short trembling staffs, while the slaver slid unheeded along the cutties which the left hand held to their toothless mouths; white-mutched grannies were keeking past the jambs; an early urchin, standing wide-legged to stare, waved his cap and shouted, "Hooray!"—and all because John Gourlay's carts were setting off upon

their morning rounds, a brave procession for a single town! Gourlay, standing great-shouldered in the middle of the road, took in every detail, devoured it grimly as a homage to his pride. "Ha! ha! ye dogs," said the soul within him. Past the pillar of the Red Lion door he could see a white peep of the landlord's waistcoat—though the rest of the mountainous man was hidden deep within his porch. (On summer mornings the vast totality of the landlord was always inferential to the town from the tiny white peep of him revealed.) Even fat Simpson had waddled to the door to see the carts going past. It was fat Simpson—might the Universe blast his adipose—who had once tried to infringe Gourlay's monopoly as the sole carrier in Barbie. There had been a rush to him at first, but Gourlay set his teeth and drove him off the road, carrying stuff for nothing till Simpson had nothing to carry, so that the local wit suggested "a wee parcel in a big cart" as a new sign for his hotel. The twelve browns prancing past would be a pill to Simpson! There was no smile about Gourlay's mouth—a fiercer glower was the only sign of his pride—but it put a bloom on his morning, he felt, to see the suggestive round of Simpson's waistcoat, down yonder at the porch. Simpson, the swine! He had made short work o' *him*!

Ere the last of the carts had issued from the yard at the House with the Green Shutters the foremost was already near the Red Lion. Gourlay swore beneath his breath when Miss Toddle—described in the local records as "a spinster of independent means"—came fluttering out with a silly little parcel to accost one of the carriers. Did the auld fool mean to stop Andy Gow

about *her* petty affairs—and thus break the line of carts on the only morning they had ever been able to go down the brae together? But no. Andy tossed her parcel carelessly up among his other packages, and left her bawling instructions from the gutter, with a portentous shaking of her corkscrew curls. Gourlay's men took their cue from their master, and were contemptuous of Barbie, most unchivalrous scorners of its old maids.

Gourlay was pleased with Andy for snubbing Sandy Toddle's sister. When he and Elshie Hogg reached the Cross they would have to break off from the rest to complete their loads, but they had been down Main Street over night as usual picking up their commissions, and until they reached the Bend o' the Brae it was unlikely that any business should arrest them now. Gourlay hoped that it might be so, and he had his desire, for, with the exception of Miss Toddle, no customer appeared. The teams went slowly down the steep side of the Square in an unbroken line, and slowly down the street leading from its near corner. On the slope the horses were unable to go fast—being forced to stell themselves back against the heavy propulsion of the carts behind; and thus the procession endured for a length of time worthy its surpassing greatness. When it disappeared round the Bend o' the Brae the watching bodies disappeared too; the event of the day had passed and vacancy resumed her reign. The street and the Square lay empty to the morning sun. Gourlay alone stood idly at his gate, lapped in his own satisfaction.

It had been a big morning, he felt. It was the first time for many a year that all his men, quarry-men and

carriers, carters of cheese and carters of grain, had led their teams down the brae together in the full view of his rivals. "I hope they liked it!" he thought, and he nodded several times at the town beneath his feet, with a slow up and down motion of the head, like a man nodding grimly to his beaten enemy. It was as if he said, "See what I have done to ye!"

II

ONLY a man of Gourlay's brute force of character could have kept all the carrying trade of Barbie in his own hands. Even in these days of railways, nearly every parish has a pair of carriers at the least, journeying once or twice a week to the nearest town. In the days when Gourlay was the great man of Barbie, railways were only beginning to thrust themselves among the quiet hills, and the bulk of inland commerce was still being drawn by horses along the country roads. Yet Gourlay was the only carrier in the town. The wonder is diminished when we remember that it had been a decaying burgh for thirty years, and that its trade, at the best of times, was of meagre volume. Even so, it was astonishing that he should be the only carrier. If you asked the natives how he did it, "Ou," they said, "he makes the one hand wash the other, doan't ye know?"—meaning thereby that he had so many horses travelling on his own business, that he could afford to carry other people's goods at rates that must cripple his rivals.

"But that's very stupid, surely," said a visitor once, who thought of entering into competition. "It's cutting off his nose to spite his face! Why is he so anxious to be the only carrier in Barbie that he carries stuff for next to noathing the moment another man tries to work the roads? It's a daft-like thing to do!"

"To be sure is't, to be sure is't! Just the stupeedity o' spite! Oh, there are times when Gourlay makes little or noathing from the carrying; but then, ye see, it gies him a fine chance to annoy folk! If you ask him to bring ye ocht, 'Oh,' he growls, 'I'll see if it suits my own convenience.' And ye have to be content. He has made so much money of late that the pride of him's not to be endured."

It was not the insolence of sudden wealth however that made Gourlay haughty to his neighbors; it was a repressiveness natural to the man and a fierce contempt of their scoffing envy. But it was true that he had made large sums of money during recent years. From his father (who had risen in the world) he inherited a fine trade in cheese; also the carrying to Skeighan on the one side and Fleckie on the other. When he married Miss Richmond of Tenshillingland, he started as a corn broker with the snug dowry that she brought him. Then, greatly to his own benefit, he succeeded in establishing a valuable connection with Templandmuir.

It was partly by sheer impact of character that Gourlay obtained his ascendancy over hearty and careless Templandmuir, and partly by a bluff joviality which he —so little cunning in other things—knew to affect among the petty lairds. The man you saw trying to be jocose with Templandmuir, was a very different being from the autocrat who "downed" his fellows in the town. It was all "How are ye the day, Templandmuir?" and "How d'ye doo-oo, Mr. Gourlay?" and the immediate production of the big decanter.

More than ten years ago now, Templandmuir gave

this fine dour upstanding friend of his a twelve-year tack of the Red Quarry—and that was the making of Gourlay. The quarry yielded the best building stone in a circuit of thirty miles, easy to work and hard against wind and weather. When the main line went north through Skeighan and Poltandie, there was a great deal of building on the far side, and Gourlay simply coined the money. He could not have exhausted the quarry had he tried—he would have had to howk down a hill—but he took thousands of loads from it for the Skeighan folk; and the commission he paid the laird on each was ridiculously small. He built wooden stables out on Templandmuir's estate—the Templar had seven hundred acres of hill land—and it was there the quarry horses generally stood. It was only rarely —once in two years, perhaps—that they came into the House with the Green Shutters. Last Saturday they had brought several loads of stuff for Gourlay's own use; and that is why they were present at the great procession on the Monday following.

It was their feeling that Gourlay's success was out of all proportion to his merits that made other great-men-in-a-small-way so bitter against him. They were an able lot, and scarce one but possessed fifty times his weight of brain. Yet he had the big way of doing, though most of them were well enough to pass. Had they not been aware of his stupidity they would never have minded his triumphs in the countryside, but they felt it with a sense of personal defeat that he—the donkey, as they thought him—should scoop every chance that was going, and leave them, the long-headed ones, still muddling in their old concerns. They consoled themselves

with sneers, he retorted with brutal scorn, and the feud kept increasing between them.

They were standing at the Cross, to enjoy their Saturday at e'en, when Gourlay's "quarriers"—as the quarry horses had been named—came through the town last week-end. There were groups of bodies in the streets, washed from toil to enjoy the quiet air; dandering slowly or gossiping at ease; and they all turned to watch the quarriers stepping bravely up, their heads tossing to the hill. The big-men-in-a-small-way glowered and said nothing.

"I wouldn't mind," said Sandy Toddle at last, "I wouldn't mind if he weren't such a demned ess!"

"Ess?" said the Deacon unpleasantly. He puckered his brow and blinked, pretending not to understand.

"Oh, a cuddy, ye know," said Toddle, colouring.

"Gourlay'th stupid enough," lisped the Deacon. "We all know that. But there'th one thing to be said on hith behalf. He's not such a 'demned ess' as to try and thpeak fancy English!"

When the Deacon was not afraid of a man he stabbed him straight. When he was afraid of him he stabbed him on the sly. He was annoyed by the passing of Gourlay's carts, and he took it out of Sandy Toddle.

"It's extr'ornar!" blurted the Provost (who was a man of brosey speech, large-mouthed and fat of utterance). "It's extr'ornar. Yass; it's extr'ornar! I mean the luck of that man—for gumption he has noan. Noan whatever! But if the railway came hereaway I wager Gourlay would go down," he added, less in cer-

tainty of knowledge than as prophet of the thing desired. "I wager he'd go down, sirs."

"Likely enough," said Sandy Toddle; "he wouldn't be quick enough to jump at the new way of doing."

"Moar than that!" cried the Provost, spite sharpening his insight, "moar than that! He'd be owre dour to abandon the auld way. *I*'m talling ye. He would just be left entirely! It's only those, like myself, who approach him on the town's affairs that know the full extent of his stupeedity."

"Oh, he's a 'demned ess,'" said the Deacon, rubbing it into Toddle and Gourlay at the same time.

"A-ah, but then, ye see, he has the abeelity that comes from character," said Johnny Coe, who was a sage philosopher. "For there are two kinds of abeelity, don't ye understa-and? There's a scattered abeelity that's of no use! Auld Randie Donaldson was good at fifty different things, and he died in the poorhouse! There's a dour kind of abeelity, though, that has no cleverness, but just gangs tramping on; and that's——"

"The easiest beaten by a flank attack," said the Deacon, snubbing him.

III

With the sudden start of a man roused from a day-dream Gourlay turned from the green gate and entered the yard. Jock Gilmour, the "orra" man, was washing down the legs of a horse beside the trough. It was Gourlay's own cob, which he used for driving round the countryside. It was a black—Gourlay "made a point" of driving with a black. "The brown for sturdiness, the black for speed," he would say, making a maxim of his whim to give it the sanction of a higher law.

Gilmour was in a wild temper because he had been forced to get up at five o'clock in order to turn several hundred cheeses, to prevent them bulging out of shape owing to the heat, and so becoming cracked and spoiled. He did not raise his head at his master's approach. And his head being bent, the eye was attracted to a patent leather collar which he wore, glazed with black and red stripes. It is a collar much affected by ploughmen, because a dip in the horse-trough once a month suffices for its washing. Between the striped collar and his hair (as he stooped) the sunburned redness of his neck struck the eye vividly—the cropped fair hairs on it shewing whitish on the red skin.

The horse quivered as the cold water swashed about its legs, and turned playfully to bite its groom. Gilmour, still stooping, dug his elbow up beneath its ribs. The animal wheeled in anger, but Gilmour ran to its

head with most manful blasphemy and led it to the stable door. The off hind leg was still unwashed.

"Has the horse but the three legs?" said Gourlay suavely.

Gilmour brought the horse back to the trough, muttering sullenly.

"Were ye saying anything?" said Gourlay. "*Eih?*"

Gilmour sulked out and said nothing; and his master smiled grimly at the sudden redness that swelled his neck and ears to the verge of bursting.

A boy, standing in his shirt and trousers at an open window of the house above, had looked down at the scene with craning interest—big-eyed. He had been alive to every turn and phase of it—the horse's quiver of delight and fear, his skittishness, the groom's ill-temper, and Gourlay's grinding will. Eh, but his father was a caution! How easy he had downed Jock Gilmour! The boy was afraid of his father himself, but he liked to see him send other folk to the right about. For he was John Gourlay, too.—Hokey, but his father could down them!

Mr. Gourlay passed on to the inner yard, which was close to the scullery door. The paved little court, within its high wooden walls, was curiously fresh and clean. A cock-pigeon strutted round, puffing his gleaming breast and *rooketty-cooing* in the sun. Large clear drops fell slowly from the spout of a wooden pump, and splashed upon a flat stone. The place seemed to enfold the stillness. There was a sense of inclusion and peace.

There is a distinct pleasure to the eye in a quiet brick court where everything is fresh and prim; in sunny weather you can lounge in a room and watch it through

an open door, in a kind of lazy dream. The boy, standing at the window above to let the fresh air blow round his neck, was alive to that pleasure; he was intensely conscious of the pigeon swelling in its bravery, of the clean yard, the dripping pump, and the great stillness. His father on the step beneath had a different pleasure in the sight. The fresh indolence of morning was round him too, but it was more than that that kept him gazing in idle happiness. He was delighting in the sense of his own property around him, the most substantial pleasure possible to man. His feeling, deep though it was, was quite vague and inarticulate. If you had asked Gourlay what he was thinking of he could not have told you, even if he had been willing to answer you civilly—which is most unlikely. Yet his whole being, physical and mental (physical, indeed, rather than mental), was surcharged with the feeling that the fine buildings around him were his, that he had won them by his own effort and built them large and significant before the world. He was lapped in the thought of it.

All men are suffused with that quiet pride in looking at the houses and lands which they have won by their endeavours—in looking at the houses more than at the lands, for the house which a man has built seems to express his character and stand for him before the world, as a sign of his success. It is more personal than cold acres, stamped with an individuality. All men know that soothing pride in the contemplation of their own property. But in Gourlay's sense of property there was another element, an element peculiar to itself, which endowed it with its warmest glow. Con-

scious always that he was at a disadvantage among his cleverer neighbours, who could achieve a civic eminence denied to him, he felt nevertheless that there was one means, a material means, by which he could hold his own and reassert himself; by the bravery of his business, namely, and all the appointments thereof —among which his dwelling was the chief. That was why he had spent so much money on the House. That was why he had such keen delight in surveying it. Every time he looked at the place he had a sense of triumph over what he knew in his bones to be an adverse public opinion. There was anger in his pleasure, and the pleasure that is mixed with anger often gives the keenest thrill. It is the delight of triumph in spite of opposition. Gourlay's house was a material expression of that delight, stood for it in stone and lime.

It was not that he reasoned deliberately when he built the house. But every improvement that he made —and he was always spending money on improvements —had for its secret motive a more or less vague desire to score off his rivals. "*That*'ll be a slap in the face to the Provost!" he smiled, when he planted his great mound of shrubs. "There's noathing like *that* about the Provost's! Ha, ha!"

Encased as he was in his hard and insensitive nature he was not the man who in new surroundings would be quick to every whisper of opinion. But he had been born and bred in Barbie, and he knew his townsmen— oh, yes, he knew them. He knew they laughed because he had no gift of the gab, and could never be Provost, or Bailie, or Elder—or even Chairman of the Gasworks!

Oh, verra well, verra well; let Connal and Brodie and Allardyce have the talk, and manage the town's affairs (he was damned if they should manage his!)—he, for his part, preferred the substantial reality. He could never aspire to the Provostship, but a man with a house like that, he was fain to think, could afford to do without it. Oh, yes; he was of opinion he could do without it! It had run him short of cash to build the place so big and braw, but, Lord! it was worth it. There wasn't a man in the town who had such accommodation!

And so, gradually, his dwelling had come to be a passion of Gourlay's life. It was a by-word in the place that if ever his ghost was seen, it would be haunting the House with the Green Shutters. Deacon Allardyce, trying to make a phrase with him, once quoted the saying in his presence. "Likely enough!" said Gourlay. "It's only reasonable I should prefer my own house to you rabble in the graveyard!"

Both in appearance and position the house was a worthy counterpart of its owner. It was a substantial two-story dwelling, planted firm and gawcey on a little natural terrace that projected a considerable distance into the Square. At the foot of the steep little bank shelving to the terrace ran a stone wall, of no great height, and the iron railings it uplifted were no higher than the sward within. Thus the whole house was bare to the view from the ground up, nothing in front to screen its admirable qualities. From each corner, behind, flanking walls went out to the right and left, and hid the yard and the granaries. In front of these walls the dwelling seemed to thrust itself out for notice. It took the eye of a stranger the moment he entered the

Square—"Whose place is that?" was his natural question. A house that challenges regard in that way should have a gallant bravery in its look; if its aspect be mean, its assertive position but directs the eye to its infirmities. There is something pathetic about a tall, cold, barn-like house set high upon a brae; it cannot hide its naked shame; it thrusts its ugliness dumbly on your notice, a manifest blotch upon the world, a place for the winds to whistle round. But Gourlay's house was worthy its commanding station. A little dour and blunt in the outlines like Gourlay himself, it drew and satisfied your eye as he did.

And its position, "cockit up there on the brae," made it the theme of constant remark, to men because of the tyrant who owned it, and to women because of the poor woman who mismanaged its affairs. "'Deed, I don't wonder that gurly Gourlay, as they ca' him, has an ill temper," said the gossips gathered at the pump, with their big bare arms akimbo; "whatever led him to marry that dishclout of a woman clean beats *me*! I never could make head nor tail o't!" As for the men, they twisted every item about Gourlay and his domicile into fresh matter of assailment. "What's the news?" asked one, returning from a long absence—to whom the smith, after smoking in silence for five minutes, said, "Gourlay has got new rones!" "Ha—aye, man, Gourlay has got new rones!" buzzed the visitor, and then their eyes, diminished in mirth, twinkled at each other from out their ruddy wrinkles, as if wit had volleyed between them. In short, the House with the Green Shutters was on every tongue—and with a scoff in the voice if possible.

IV

GOURLAY went swiftly to the kitchen from the inner yard. He had stood so long in silence on the step, and his coming was so noiseless, that he surprised a long thin trollop of a woman, with a long thin scraggy neck, seated by the slatternly table, and busy with a frowsy paper-covered volume, over which her head was bent in intent perusal.

"At your novelles?" said he. "Aye, woman; will it be a good story?"

She rose in a nervous flutter when she saw him; yet needlessly shrill in her defence, because she was angry at detection.

"Ah, well!" she cried, in weary petulance, "it's an unco thing if a body's not to have a moment's rest after such a morning's darg! I just sat down wi' the book for a little, till John should come till his breakfast!"

"So?" said Gourlay.

"God aye!" he went on, "you're making a nice job of *him*. *He*'ll be a credit to the House. Oh, it's right, no doubt, that *you* should neglect your work till *he* consents to rise."

"Eh, the puir la-amb," she protested, dwelling on the vowels in fatuous maternal love, "the bairn's wearied, man! He's ainything but strong, and the schooling's owre sore on him."

CHAPTER FOUR

"Poor lamb, atweel," said Gourlay. "It was a muckle sheep that dropped him."

It was Gourlay's pride in his house that made him harsher to his wife than others, since her sluttishness was a constant offence to the order in which he loved to have his dear possessions. He, for his part, liked everything precise. His claw-toed hammer always hung by the head on a couple of nails close together near the big clock; his gun always lay across a pair of wooden pegs, projecting from the brown rafters, just above the hearth. His bigotry in trifles expressed his character. Strong men of a mean understanding often deliberately assume, and passionately defend, peculiarities of no importance, because they have nothing else to get a repute for. "No, no," said Gourlay; "you'll never see a brown cob in *my* gig—I wouldn't take one in a present!" He was full of such fads, and nothing should persuade him to alter the crotchets, which, for want of something better, he made the marks of his dour character. He had worked them up as part of his personality, and his pride of personality was such that he would never consent to change them. Hence the burly and gurly man was prim as an old maid with regard to his belongings. Yet his wife was continually infringing the order on which he set his heart. If he went forward to the big clock to look for his hammer, it was sure to be gone—the two bright nails staring at him vacantly. "Oh," she would say in weary complaint, "I just took it to break a wheen coals";—and he would find it in the coal-hole, greasy and grimy finger-marks engrained on the handle which he loved to keep so smooth and clean. Innumerable her offences of the kind. Independent of these,

the sight of her general incompetence filled him with a seething rage, which found vent not in lengthy tirades but the smooth venom of his tongue. Let him keep the outside of the House never so spick and span, inside was awry with her untidiness. She was unworthy of the House with the Green Shutters—that was the gist of it. Every time he set eyes on the poor trollop, the fresh perception of her incompetence which the sudden sight of her flashed, as she trailed aimlessly about, seemed to fatten his rage and give a coarser birr to his tongue.

Mrs. Gourlay had only four people to look after, her husband, her two children, and Jock Gilmour, the orra man. And the wife of Dru'cken Wabster—who had to go charing because she was the wife of Dru'cken Wabster—came in every day, and all day long, to help her with the work. Yet the house was always in confusion. Mrs. Gourlay had asked for another servant, but Gourlay would not allow that; "one's enough," said he, and what he once laid down, he never went back on. Mrs. Gourlay had to muddle along as best she could, and having no strength either of mind or body, she let things drift and took refuge in reading silly fiction.

As Gourlay shoved his feet into his boots, and stamped to make them easy, he glowered at the kitchen from under his heavy brows with a huge disgust. The table was littered with unwashed dishes, and on the corner of it next him was a great black sloppy ring, showing where a wet saucepan had been laid upon the bare board. The sun streamed through the window in yellow heat right on to a pat of melting butter. There was a basin of dirty water beneath the table, with the dishcloth slopping over on the ground.

"It's a tidy house!" said he.

"Ach well," she cried, "you and your kitchen-range! It was that that did it! The masons could have redd out the fireplace to make room for't in the afternoon before it comes hame. They could have done't brawly, but ye wouldna hear o't—oh, no—ye bude to have the whole place gutted out yestreen. I had to boil everything on the parlour fire this morning—no wonder I'm a little tousy!"

The old fashioned kitchen grate had been removed and the jambs had been widened on each side of the fireplace; it yawned, empty and cold. A little rubble of mortar, newly dried, lay about the bottom of the square recess. The sight of the crude, unfamiliar scraps of dropped lime in the gaping place where warmth should have been, increased the discomfort of the kitchen.

"Oh, that's it!" said Gourlay. "I see! It was want of the fireplace that kept ye from washing the dishes that we used yestreen. That was terrible! However, ye'll have plenty of boiling water when I put in the grand new range for ye; there winna be its equal in the parish! We'll maybe have a clean house *than*."

Mrs. Gourlay leaned, with the outspread thumb and red raw knuckles of her right hand, on the sloppy table, and gazed away through the back window of the kitchen in a kind of mournful vacancy. Always when her first complaining defence had failed to turn aside her husband's tongue, her mind became a blank beneath his heavy sarcasms, and sought refuge by drifting far away. She would fix her eyes on the distance in dreary contemplation, and her mind would follow her eyes, in a vacant and wistful regard. The preoccupation of her

mournful gaze enabled her to meet her husband's sneers with a kind of numb unheeding acquiescence. She scarcely heard them.

Her head hung a little to one side as if too heavy for her wilting neck. Her hair, of a dry red brown, curved low on either side of her brow, in a thick untidy mass, to her almost transparent ears. As she gazed in weary and dreary absorption her lips had fallen heavy and relaxed, in unison with her mood; and through her open mouth her breathing was quick, and short, and noiseless. She wore no stays, and her slack cotton blouse shewed the flatness of her bosom, and the faint outlines of her withered and pendulous breasts hanging low within.

There was something tragic in her pose, as she stood, sad and abstracted, by the dirty table. She was scraggy helplessness, staring in sorrowful vacancy. But Gourlay eyed her with disgust—why, by Heaven, even now her petticoat was gaping behind, worse than the sloven's at the Red Lion. She was a pr-r-retty wife for John Gourlay! The sight of her feebleness would have roused pity in some: Gourlay it moved to a steady and seething rage. As she stood helpless before him he stung her with crude, brief irony.

Yet he was not wilfully cruel; only a stupid man with a strong character, in which he took a dogged pride. Stupidity and pride provoked the brute in him. He was so dull—only dull is hardly the word for a man of his smouldering fire—he was so dour of wit that he could never hope to distinguish himself by anything in the shape of cleverness. Yet so resolute a man must make the strong personality of which he was

proud, tell in some way. How, then, should he assert his superiority and hold his own? Only by affecting a brutal scorn of everything said and done unless it was said and done by John Gourlay. His lack of understanding made his affectation of contempt the easier. A man can never sneer at a thing which he really understands. Gourlay, understanding nothing, was able to sneer at everything. "Hah! I don't understand that; it's damned nonsense!"—that was his attitude to life. If "that" had been an utterance of Shakespeare or Napoleon it would have made no difference to John Gourlay. It would have been damned nonsense just the same. And he would have told them so, if he had met them.

The man had made dogged scorn a principle of life to maintain himself, at the height which his courage warranted. His thickness of wit was never a bar to the success of his irony. For the irony of the ignorant Scot is rarely the outcome of intellectual qualities. It depends on a falsetto voice and the use of a recognized number of catchwords. "Dee-ee-ar me, dee-ee-ar me"; "Just so-a, just so-a"; "Im-phm!" "D'ye tell me that?" "Wonderful, serr, wonderful"; "Ah, well, may-ay-be, may-ay-be,"—these be words of potent irony when uttered with a certain birr. Long practice had made Gourlay an adept in their use. He never spoke to those he despised or disliked, without "the birr." Not that he was voluble of speech; he wasn't clever enough for lengthy abuse. He said little and his voice was low, but every word from the hard, clean lips was a stab. And often his silence was more withering than any utterance. It struck life like a black frost.

In those early days, to be sure, Gourlay had less occasion for the use of his crude but potent irony, since the sense of his material well-being warmed him and made him less bitter to the world. To the substantial farmers and petty squires around he was civil, even hearty, in his manner—unless they offended him. For they belonged to the close corporation of "bien men," and his familiarity with them was a proof to the world of his greatness. Others, again, were far too far beneath him already for him to "down" them. He reserved his jibes for his immediate foes, the assertive bodies his rivals in the town—and for his wife, who was a constant eyesore. As for her, he had baited the poor woman so long that it had become a habit; he never spoke to her without a sneer. "Aye, where have *you* been stravaiging to?" he would drawl, and if she answered meekly, "I was taking a dander to the linn owre-bye," "The linn!" he would take her up; "ye had a heap to do to gang there; your Bible would fit you better on a bonny Sabbath afternune!" Or it might be: "What's that you're burying your nose in now?" and if she faltered, "It's the Bible," "Hi!" he would laugh, "you're turning godly in your auld age. Weel, I'm no saying but it's time."

"Where's Janet?" he demanded, stamping his boots once more, now he had them laced.

"Eh?" said his wife vaguely, turning her eyes from the window. "Wha-at?"

"Ye're not turning deaf, I hope. I was asking ye where Janet was."

"I sent her down to Scott's for a can o' milk," she answered him wearily.

"No doubt ye had to send *her*," said he. "What ails the lamb that ye couldna send *him*? Eh?"

"Oh, she was about when I wanted the milk, and she volunteered to gang. Man, it seems I never do a thing to please ye! What harm will it do her to run for a drop milk?"

"Noan," he said gravely, "noan. And it's right, no doubt, that her brother should still be a-bed—oh, it's right that he should get the privilege—seeing he's the eldest!"

Mrs. Gourlay was what the Scotch call "browdened * on her boy." In spite of her slack grasp on life—perhaps, because of it—she clung with a tenacious fondness to him. He was all she had, for Janet was a thowless † thing, too like her mother for her mother to like her. And Gourlay had discovered that it was one way of getting at his wife to be hard upon the thing she loved. In his desire to nag and annoy her, he adopted a manner of hardness and repression to his son—which became permanent. He was always "down" on John. The more so because Janet was his own favourite—perhaps, again, because her mother seemed to neglect her. Janet was a very unlovely child, with a long tallowy face and a pimply brow, over which a stiff fringe of whitish hair came down almost to her staring eyes, the eyes themselves being large, pale blue, and saucer-like, with a great margin of unhealthy white. But Gourlay, though he never petted her, had a silent satisfaction in his daughter. He took

* *Browdened*: a Scot devoted to his children is said to be "browdened on his bairns."

† *Thowless*, weak, useless.

her about with him in the gig, on Saturday afternoons, when he went to buy cheese and grain at the outlying farms. And he fed her rabbits when she had the fever. It was a curious sight to see the dour silent man mixing oatmeal and wet tea-leaves in a saucer at the dirty kitchen-table, and then marching off to the hutch, with the ridiculous dish in his hand, to feed his daughter's pets.

A sudden yell of pain and alarm rang through the kitchen. It came from the outer yard.

When the boy, peering from the window above, saw his father disappear through the scullery door, he stole out. The coast was clear at last.

He passed through to the outer yard. Jock Gilmour had been dashing water on the paved floor, and was now sweeping it out with a great whalebone besom. The hissing whalebone sent a splatter of dirty drops showering in front of it. John set his bare feet wide (he was only in his shirt and knickers) and eyed the man whom his father had "downed" with a kind of silent swagger. He felt superior. His pose was instinct with the feeling: "*My* father is *your* master, and ye daurna stand up till him." Children of masterful sires often display that attitude towards dependants. The feeling is not the less real for being subconscious.

Jock Gilmour was still seething with a dour anger because Gourlay's quiet will had ground him to the task. When John came out and stood there, he felt tempted to vent on him, the spite he felt against his father. The subtle suggestion of criticism and superiority in the boy's pose intensified the wish. Not that Gilmour acted from deliberate malice; his irritation

was instinctive. Our wrath against those whom we fear is generally wreaked upon those whom we don't.

John, with his hands in his pockets, strutted across the yard, still watching Gilmour with that silent offensive look. He came into the path of the whalebone. "Get out, you smeowt!" cried Gilmour, and with a vicious shove of the brush he sent a shower of dirty drops spattering about the boy's bare legs.

"Hallo you! what are ye after?" bawled the boy. "Don't you try that on again, I'm telling ye. What are *you*, onyway. Ye're just a servant. Hay-ay-ay, my man, my faither's the boy for ye. *He* can put ye in your place."

Gilmour made to go at him with the head of the whalebone besom. John stooped and picked up the wet lump of cloth with which Gilmour had been washing down the horse's legs.

"Would ye?" said Gilmour, threateningly.

"Would I no?" said John, the wet lump poised for throwing, level with his shoulder.

But he did not throw it for all his defiant air. He hesitated. He would have liked to slash it into Gilmour's face, but a swift vision of what would happen if he did, withheld his craving arm. His irresolution was patent in his face; in his eyes there was both a threat and a watchful fear. He kept the dirty cloth poised in mid-air.

"Drap the clout," said Gilmour.

"I'll no," said John.

Gilmour turned sideways and whizzed the head of the besom round so that its dirty spray rained in the boy's face and eyes. John let him have the wet lump

slash in his mouth. Gilmour dropped the besom and hit him a sounding thwack on the ear. John hullabalooed. Murther and desperation!

Ere he had gathered breath for a second roar his mother was present in the yard. She was passionate in defence of her cub, and rage transformed her. Her tense frame vibrated in anger; you would scarce have recognised the weary trollop of the kitchen.

"What's the matter, Johnny dear?" she cried, with a fierce glance at Gilmour.

"Gilmour hut me!" he bellowed angrily.

"Ye muckle lump!" she cried shrilly, the two scraggy muscles of her neck standing out long and thin as she screamed; "ye muckle lump—to strike a defenceless wean!—Dinna greet, my lamb, I'll no let him meddle ye.—Jock Gilmour, how daur ye lift your finger to a wean of mine. But I'll learn ye the better o't! Mr. Gourlay'll gie *you* the order to travel ere the day's muckle aulder. I'll have no servant about *my* hoose to ill-use *my* bairn."

She stopped, panting angrily for breath, and glared at her darling's enemy.

"*Your* servant!" cried Gilmour in contempt. "Ye're a nice-looking object to talk about servants." He pointed at her slovenly dress and burst into a blatant laugh: "Huh, huh, huh!"

Mr. Gourlay had followed more slowly from the kitchen as befitted a man of his superior character. He heard the row well enough, but considered it beneath him to hasten to a petty squabble.

"What's this?" he demanded, with a widening look. Gilmour scowled at the ground.

CHAPTER FOUR

"This!" shrilled Mrs. Gourlay, who had recovered her breath again; "this! Look at him there, the muckle slabber," and she pointed to Gilmour who was standing with a red-lowering, downcast face; "look at him! A man of that size to even himsell to a wean!"

"He deserved a' he got," said Gilmour sullenly. "His mother spoils him at ony rate. And I'm damned if the best Gourlay that ever dirtied leather's gaun to trample owre *me*."

Gourlay jumped round with a quick start of the whole body. For a full minute he held Gilmour in the middle of his steady glower.

"Walk," he said, pointing to the gate.

"Oh, I'll walk," bawled Gilmour, screaming now that anger gave him courage. "Gie me time to get *my* kist, and I'll walk mighty quick. And damned glad I'll be, to get redd o' you and your hoose. The Hoose wi' the Green Shutters," he laughed, "hi, hi, hi! the Hoose wi' the Green Shutters!"

Gourlay went slowly up to him, opening his eyes on him black and wide. "You swine!" he said with quiet vehemence; "for damned little I would kill ye wi' a glower!" Gilmour shrank from the blaze in his eyes.

"Oh, dinna be fee-ee-ared," said Gourlay quietly, "dinna be fee-ee-ared. I wouldn't dirty my hand on 'ee! But get your bit kist, and I'll see ye off the premises. Suspeecious characters are worth the watching."

"Suspeecious!" stuttered Gilmour, "suspeecious! Wh-wh-whan was I ever suspeecious? I'll have the law of ye for that. I'll make ye answer for your wor-rds."

"Imphm!" said Gourlay. "In the meantime, look

slippy wi' that bit box o' yours. I don't like daft folk about *my* hoose."

"There'll be dafter folk as me in your hoose yet," spluttered Gilmour angrily as he turned away.

He went up to the garret where he slept and brought down his trunk. As he passed through the scullery, bowed beneath the clumsy burden on his left shoulder, John, recovered from his sobbing, mocked at him.

"Hay-ay-ay," he said, in throaty derision, "my faither's the boy for ye. Yon was the way to put ye down!"

V

In every little Scotch community there is a distinct type known as "the bodie." "What does he do, that man?" you may ask, and the answer will be, "Really, I could hardly tell ye what he does—he's juist a bodie!" The "bodie" may be a gentleman of independent means (a hundred a year from the Funds) fussing about in spats and light check breeches; or he may be a jobbing gardener; but he is equally a "bodie." The chief occupation of his idle hours (and his hours are chiefly idle) is the discussion of his neighbour's affairs. He is generally an "auld residenter"; great, therefore, at the redding up of pedigrees. He can tell you exactly, for instance, how it is that young Pin-oe's taking geyly to the dram: for his grandfather, it seems, was a terrible man for the drink—ou, just terrible—why, he went to bed with a full jar of whiskey once, and when he left it, he was dead, and it was empty. So ye see, that's the reason o't.

The genus "bodie" is divided into two species: the "harmless bodies" and the "nesty bodies." The bodies of Barbie mostly belonged to the second variety. Johnny Coe, and Tam Wylie, and the baker, were decent enough fellows in their way, but the others were the sons of scandal. Gourlay spoke of them as a "wheen damned auld wives."—But Gourlay, to be sure, was not an impartial witness.

The Bend o' the Brae was the favourite stance of the bodies; here they foregathered every day to pass judgment on the town's affairs. And, indeed, the place had many things to recommend it. Among the chief it was within an easy distance of the Red Lion, farther up the street, to which it was really very convenient to adjourn nows and nans. Standing at the Bend o' the Brae, too, you could look along two roads to the left and right, or down upon the Cross beneath, and the three low streets that guttered away from it. Or you might turn and look up Main Street, and past the side of the Square, to the House with the Green Shutters, the highest in the town. The Bend o' the Brae, you will gather, was a fine post for observation. It had one drawback, true; if Gourlay turned to the right in his gig he disappeared in a moment, and you could never be sure where he was off to. But even that afforded matter for pleasing speculation which often lasted half an hour.

It was about nine o'clock when Gourlay and Gilmour quarrelled in the yard, and that was the hour when the bodies foregathered for their morning dram.

"Good moarning, Mr. Wylie!" said the Provost.—When the Provost wished you good morning, with a heavy civic eye, you felt sure it was going to be good.

"Mornin', Provost, mornin'! Fine weather for the fields," said Tam, casting a critical glance at the blue dome in which a soft white-bosomed cloud floated high above the town. "If this weather hauds, it'll be a blessing for us poor farming bodies."

Tam was a wealthy old hunks, but it suited his hu-

mour to refer to himself constantly as "a poor farming bodie." And he dressed in accordance with his humour. His clean old crab-apple face was always grinning at you from over a white-sleeved moleskin waistcoat, as if he had been no better than a breaker of road-mettle.

"Faith aye!" said the Provost, cunning and quick—"fodder should be cheap"—and he shot the covetous glimmer of a bargain-making eye at Mr. Wylie.

Tam drew himself up. He saw what was coming.

"We're needing some hay for the burgh horse," said the Provost. "Ye'll be willing to sell at fifty shillings the ton, since it's like to be so plentiful."

"Oh," said Tam solemnly, "that's on-possible! Gourlay's seeking the three pound! And where he leads we maun a' gang. Gourlay sets the tune and Barbie dances till't."

That was quite untrue so far as the speaker was concerned. It took a clever man to make Tam Wylie dance to his piping. But Thomas, the knave, knew that he could always take a rise out the Provost by cracking up the Gourlays, and that to do it now was the best way of fobbing him off about the hay.

"Gourlay!" muttered the Provost in disgust. And Tam winked at the baker.

"Losh!" said Sandy Toddle, "yonder's the Free Kirk Minister going past the Cross! Where'll *he* be off till, at this hour of the day? He's not often up so soon."

"They say he sits late studying," said Johnny Coe.

"H'mph, studying!" grunted Tam Brodie, a big heavy wall-cheeked man, whose little side-glancing eyes seemed always alert for scandal amid the massive inso-

lence of his smooth face. "I see few signs of studying in *him*. He's noathing but a stink wi' a skin on't."

T. Brodie was a very important man, look you, and wrote "Leather Mercht." above his door, though he cobbled with his own hands. He was a staunch Conservative, and down on the Dissenters.

"What road'th he taking?" lisped Deacon Allardyce, craning past Brodie's big shoulder to get a look.

"He's stoppit to speak to Widow Wallace. What will he be saying to *her*?"

"She's a greedy bodie that Mrs. Wallace; I wouldna wonder but she's spiering him for bawbees."

"Will he take the Skeighan Road, I wonder?"

"Or the Fechars?"

"He's a great man for gathering gowans and other sic trash. He's maybe for a dander up the burn juist. They say he's a great botanical man."

"Aye," said Brodie, "paidling in a burn's the ploy for him. He's a weanly gowk."

"A-a-ah!" protested the baker, who was a Burnsomaniac, "there's waur than a walk by the bank o' a bonny burn. Ye ken what Mossgiel said:

> "'The Muse nae poet ever fand her,
> Till by himsel he learned to wander,
> Adown some trottin burn's meander,
> And no thick lang;
> Oh sweet, to muse and pensive ponder
> A heartfelt sang.'"

Poetical quotations however made the Provost uncomfortable. "Aye," he said drily in his throat; "verra good, baker, verra good! — Whose yellow

doag's that? I never saw the beast about the town before!"

"Nor me either. It's a perfect stranger!"

"It's like a herd's doag!"

"Man, you're right! That's just what it will be. The morn's Fleckie lamb fair, and some herd or other'll be in about the town."

"He'll be drinking in some public house, I'se warrant, and the doag will have lost him."

"Imph, that'll be the way o't."

"I'm demned if he hasn't taken the Skeighan Road!" said Sandy Toddle, who had kept his eye on the minister.—Toddle's accent was a varying quality. When he remembered he had been a packman in England it was exceedingly fine. But he often forgot.

"The Skeighan Road! The Skeighan Road! Who'll he be going to see in that airt? Will it be Templandmuir?"

"Gosh, it canna be Templandmuir. He was there no later than yestreen!"

"Here's a man coming down the brae!" announced Johnny Coe in a solemn voice, as if a man "coming down the brae" was something unusual. In a moment every head was turned to the hill.

"What's yon he's carrying on his shouther?" pondered Brodie.

"It looks like a boax," said the Provost, slowly, bending every effort of eye and mind to discover what it really was. He was giving his profoundest cogitations to the "boax."

"It *is* a boax! But who is it though? I canna make him out."

"Dod, I canna tell either; his head's so bent with his burden!"

At last the man, laying his "boax" on the ground, stood up to ease his spine, so that his face was visible.

"Losh, it's Jock Gilmour, the orra man at Gourlay's! What'll *he* be doing out on the street at this hour of the day? I thocht he was always busy on the premises! Will Gourlay be sending him off with something to somebody? But no; that canna be. He would have sent it with the carts."

"I'll wager ye," cried Johnny Coe quickly, speaking more loudly than usual in the animation of discovery, "I'll wager ye Gourlay has quarrelled him and put him to the door!"

"Man, you're right! That'll just be it, that'll just be it! Aye; aye; faith aye; and yon'll be his kist he's carrying! Man, you're right, Mr. Coe; you have just put your finger on't. We'll hear news *this* morning."

They edged forward to the middle of the road, the Provost in front, to meet Gilmour coming down.

"Ye've a heavy burden this morning, John," said the Provost graciously.

"No wonder, sir," said Gilmour with big-eyed solemnity, and set down the chest; "it's no wonder, seeing that I'm carrying my a-all."

"Aye, man, John. How's that na?"

To be the centre of interest and the object of gracious condescension was balm to the wounded feelings of Gilmour. Gourlay had lowered him, but this reception restored him to his own good opinion. He was usually called "Jock" (except by his mother, to whom, of course, he was "oor Johnny") but the best mer-

chants in the town were addressing him as "John." It was a great occasion. Gilmour expanded in gossip beneath its influence benign.

He welcomed, too, this first and fine opportunity of venting his wrath on the Gourlays.

"Oh, I just telled Gourlay what I thocht of him, and took the door ahint me. I let him have it hot and hardy, I can tell ye. He'll no' forget *me* in a hurry"—Gilmour bawled angrily, and nodded his head significantly, and glared fiercely, to show what good cause he had given Gourlay to remember him—"he'll no forget *me* for a month of Sundays."

"Aye, man, John, what did ye say till him?"

"Na, man, what did he say to you?"

"Wath he angry, Dyohn?"

"How did the thing begin?"

"Tell us, man, John."

"What was it a-all about, John?"

"Was Mrs. Gourlay there?"

Bewildered by this pelt of questions Gilmour answered the last that hit his ear. "There, aye; faith, she was there. It was her was the cause o't."

"D'ye tell me that, John? Man, you surprise me. I would have thocht the thowless trauchle * hadna the smeddum left to interfere."

"Oh, it was yon boy of hers. He's aye swaggerin' aboot, interferin' wi' folk at their wark—he follows his faither's example in that, for as the auld cock craws the young ane learns—and his mither's that daft aboot him that ye daurna give a look! He came in my road when I was sweeping out the close, and some o' the dirty

* *Trauchle*, a poor trollop who trails about; *smeddum*, grit.

jaups splashed about his shins; but was I to blame for that?—ye maun walk wide o' a whalebone besom if ye dinna want to be splashed. Afore I kenned where I was, he up wi' a dirty washing-clout and slashed me in the face wi't! I hit him a thud in the ear—as wha wadna? Out come his mither like a fury, skirling about *her* hoose, and *her* servants, and *her* weans. 'Your servant!' says I, 'your servant! You're a nice-looking trollop to talk aboot servants,' says I."

"Did ye really, John?"

"Man, that wath bauld o' ye."

"And what did *she* say?"

"Oh, she just kept skirling! And then, to be sure, Gourlay must come out and interfere! But I telled him to his face what I thocht of *him*! 'The best Gourlay that ever dirtied leather,' says I, ''s no gaun to make dirt of me,' says I."

"Aye man, Dyohn!" lisped Deacon Allardyce, with bright and eagerly enquiring eyes. "And what did he thay to that, na? *That* wath a dig for him! I'the warrant he wath angry."

"Angry? He foamed at the mouth! But I up and says to him, 'I have had enough o' you,' says I, 'you and your Hoose wi' the Green Shutters,' says I, 'you're no fit to have a decent servant,' says I. 'Pay *me my* wages and I'll be redd o' ye,' says I. And wi' that I flang my kist on my shouther and slapped the gate ahint me."

"And *did* he pay ye your wages?" Tam Wylie probed him slily, with a sideward glimmer in his eye.

"Ah, well, no; not exactly," said Gilmour drawing in. "But I'll get them right enough for a' that. He'll

no get the better o' *me*." Having grounded unpleasantly on the question of the wages he thought it best to be off ere the bloom was dashed from his importance, so he shouldered his chest and went. The bodies watched him down the street.

"He's a lying brose, that," said the baker. "We a' ken what Gourlay is. He would have flung Gilmour out by the scruff o' the neck, if he had daured to set his tongue against him!"

"Faith, that's so," said Tam Wylie and Johnny Coe together.

But the others were divided between their perception of the fact and their wish to believe that Gourlay had received a thrust or two. At other times they would have been the first to scoff at Gilmour's swagger. Now their animus against Gourlay prompted them to back it up.

"Oh, I'm not so sure of tha-at, baker," cried the Provost, in the false loud voice of a man defending a position which he knows to be unsound. "I'm no so sure of that, at a-all. A-a-ah, mind ye," he drawled persuasively, "he's a hardy fallow, that Gilmour. I've no doubt he gied Gourlay a good dig or two. Let us howp they will do him good."

For many reasons intimate to the Scot's character, envious scandal is rampant in petty towns such as Barbie. To go back to the beginning, the Scot, as pundits will tell you, is an individualist. His religion alone is enough to make him so. For it is a scheme of personal salvation significantly described once by the Reverend Mr. Struthers of Barbie. "At the Day of Judgment, my frehnds," said Mr. Struthers; "at the Day of Judg-

ment every herring must hang by his own tail!" Self-dependence was never more luridly expressed. History, climate, social conditions, and the national beverage have all combined (the pundits go on) to make the Scot an individualist, fighting for his own hand. The better for him if it be so; from that he gets the grit that tells.

From their individualism, however, comes inevitably a keen spirit of competition (the more so because Scotch democracy gives fine chances to compete), and from their keen spirit of competition comes, inevitably again, an envious belittlement of rivals. If a man's success offends your individuality, to say everything you can against him is a recognised weapon of the fight. It takes him down a bit. And (inversely) elevates his rival.

It is in a small place like Barbie that such malignity is most virulent, because in a small place like Barbie every man knows everything to his neighbour's detriment. He can redd up his rival's pedigree, for example, and lower his pride (if need be) by detailing the disgraces of his kin. "I have grand news the day!" a big-hearted Scot will exclaim (and when their hearts are big they are big to hypertrophy)—"I have grand news the day! Man, Jock Goudie has won the C. B."—"Jock Goudie," an envious bodie will pucker as if he had never heard the name; "Jock Goudie? Wha's *he* for a Goudie? Oh aye, let me see now. He's a brother o'—eh, a brother o'—eh (tit-tit-titting on his brow)—oh, just a brother o' Dru'cken Will Goudie o' Auchterwheeze! Oo-ooh I ken *him* fine. His grannie keepit a sweetie-shop in Strathbungo."—There you have the "nesty" Scotsman.

CHAPTER FIVE

Even if Gourlay had been a placable and inoffensive man, then, the malignants of the petty burgh (it was scarce bigger than a village) would have fastened on his character, simply because he was above them. No man has a keener eye for behaviour than the Scot (especially when spite wings his intuition), and Gourlay's thickness of wit, and pride of place, would in any case have drawn their sneers. So, too, on lower grounds, would his wife's sluttishness. But his repressiveness added a hundred-fold to their hate of him. That was the particular cause, which acting on their general tendency to belittle a too-successful rival, made their spite almost monstrous against him. Not a man among them but had felt the weight of his tongue —for edge it had none. He walked among them like the dirt below his feet. There was no give and take in the man; he could be verra jocose with the lairds, to be sure, but he never dropped in to the Red Lion for a crack and a dram with the town-folk; he just glowered as if he could devour them! And who was he, I should like to know? His grandfather had been noathing but a common carrier!

Hate was the greater on both sides because it was often impotent. Gourlay frequently suspected offence, and seethed because he had no idea how to meet it —except by driving slowly down the brae in his new gig and never letting on when the Provost called to him. That was a wipe in the eye for the Provost! The "bodies," on their part, could rarely get near enough Gourlay to pierce his armour; he kept them off him by his brutal dourness. For it was not only pride and arrogance, but a consciousness, also, that he was no match for

them at their own game, that kept Gourlay away from their society. They were adepts at the under stroke and they would have given him many a dig if he had only come amongst them. But, oh, no; not he; he was the big man; he never gave a body a chance! Or if you did venture a bit jibe when you met him, he glowered you off the face of the earth with thae black e'en of his. Oh, how they longed to get at him! It was not the least of the evils caused by Gourlay's black pride that it perverted a dozen characters. The "bodies" of Barbie may have been decent enough men in their own way, but against him their malevolence was monstrous. It shewed itself in an insane desire to seize on every scrap of gossip they might twist against him. That was why the Provost lowered municipal dignity to gossip in the street with a discharged servant. As the baker said afterwards, it was absurd for a man in his "poseetion." But it was done with the sole desire of hearing something that might tell against Gourlay. Even Countesses, we are told, gossip with malicious maids, about other Countesses. Spite is a great leveller.

"Shall we adjourn?" said Brodie, when they had watched Jock Gilmour out of sight. He pointed across his shoulder to the Red Lion.

"Better noat just now," said the Provost, nodding in slow authority; "better noat just now! I'm very anxious to see Gourlay about yon matter we were speaking of, doan't ye understa-and? But I'm determined not to go to his house! On the other hand if we go into the Red Lion the now, we may miss him on the street. We'll noat have loang to wait, though; he'll be down the town directly, to look at the horses he has at the

gerse out the Fechars Road. But *I'm* talling ye, I simply will noat go to his house—to put up with a wheen damned insults!" he puffed in angry recollection.

"To tell the truth," said Wylie, "I don't like to call upon Gourlay, either. I'm aware of his eyes on my back when I slink beaten through his gate—and I feel that my hurdies are wanting in dignity!"

"Huh!" spluttered Brodie, "that never affects me. I come stunting out in a bleeze of wrath and slam the yett ahint me!"

"Oh, well," said the Deacon, "that'th one way of being dignified."

"I'm afraid," said Sandy Toddle, "that he won't be in a very good key to consider our request this morning, after his quarrel with Gilmour."

"No," said the Provost, "he'll be blazing angry! It's most unfoartunate. But we maun try to get his consent be his temper what it will. It's a matter of importance to the town, doan't ye see, and if he refuses, we simply can-noat proceed wi' the improvement."

"It was Gilmour's jibe at the House wi' the Green Shutters that would anger him the most—for it's the perfect god of his idolatry. Eh, sirs, he has wasted an awful money upon yon house!"

"Wasted's the word!" said Brodie with a blatant laugh. "Wasted's the word! They say he has verra little lying cash! And I shouldna be surprised at all. For, ye see, Gibson the builder diddled him owre the building o't."

"Oh, I'se warrant Cunning Johnny would get the better of an ass like Gourlay. But how in particular, Mr. Brodie? Have ye heard ainy details?"

"I've been on the track o' the thing for a while back, but it was only yestreen I had the proofs o't. It was Robin Wabster that telled me. He's a jouking bodie, Robin, and he was ahint a dyke up the Skeighan Road when Gibson and Gourlay foregathered—they stoppit just forenenst him! Gourlay began to curse at the size of Gibson's bill, but Cunning Johnny kenned the way to get round him brawly. 'Mr. Gourlay,' says he, 'there's not a thing in your house that a man in your poseetion can afford to be without—and ye needn't expect the best house in Barbie for an oald song!' And Gourlay was pacified at once! It appeared frae their crack, however, that Gibson has diddled him tremendous. 'Verra well then,' Robin heard Gourlay cry, 'you must allow me a while ere I pay that!' I wager, for a' sae muckle as he's made of late, that his balance at the bank's a sma' yin."

"More thyow than thubstanth," said the Deacon.

"Well, I'm sure!" said the Provost, "he needn't have built such a gra-and house to put a slut of a wife like yon in!"

"I was surprised," said Sandy Toddle, "to hear about her firing up. I wouldn't have thought she had the spirit, or that Gourlay would have come to her support!"

"Oh," said the Provost, "it wasn't her he was thinking of! It was his own pride, the brute. He leads the woman the life of a doag. I'm surprised that he ever married her!"

"I ken fine how he married her," said Johnny Coe. "I was acquaint wi' her faither, auld Tenshillingland owre at Fechars—a grand farmer he was, wi' land o' his

nain, and a gey pickle bawbees. It was the bawbees, and not the woman, that Gourlay went after! It was *her* money, as ye ken, that set him on his feet, and made him such a big man. He never cared a preen for *her*, and then when she proved a dirty trollop, he couldna endure her look! That's what makes him so sore upon her now. And yet I mind her a braw lass, too," said Johnny the sentimentalist, "a braw lass she was," he mused, "wi' fine, brown glossy hair, I mind, and,—ochonee! ochonee! —as daft as a yett in a windy day. She had a cousin, Jenny Wabster, that dwelt in Tenshillingland than, and mony a summer nicht up the Fechars Road, when ye smelled the honey-suckle in the gloaming, I have heard the two o' them tee-heeing owre the lads thegither, skirling in the dark and lauching to themselves. They were of the glaikit kind ye can always hear loang before ye see. Jock Allan (that has done so well in Embro) was a herd at Tenshillingland than, and he likit her, and I think she likit him, but Gourlay came wi' his gig and whisked her away. She doesna lauch sae muckle now, puir bodie! But a braw lass she——"

"It's you maun speak to Gourlay, Deacon," said the Provost, brushing aside the reminiscent Coe.

"How can it be that, Provost? It'th *your* place, surely. You're the head of the town!"

When Gourlay was to be approached there was always a competition for who should be hindmost.

"Yass, but you know perfectly well, Deacon, that I cannot thole the look of him. I simply cannot thole the look! And he knows it too. The thing'll gang smash at the outset—*I'm* talling ye, now—it'll go smash

at the outset if it's left to me.—And than, ye see, you have a better way of approaching folk!"

"Ith that tho?" said the Deacon drily. He shot a suspicious glance to see if the Provost was guying him.

"Oh, it must be left to you, Deacon," said the baker and Tam Wylie in a breath.

"Certainly, it maun be left to the Deacon," assented Johnny Coe, when he saw how the others were giving their opinion.

"Tho be it, then," snapped the Deacon.

"Here he comes," said Sandy Toddle.

Gourlay came down the street towards them, his chest big, his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. He had the power of staring steadily at those whom he approached without the slightest sign of recognition or intelligence appearing in his eyes. As he marched down upon the bodies he fixed them with a wide-open glower that was devoid of every expression but courageous steadiness. It gave a kind of fierce vacancy to his look.

The Deacon limped forward on his thin shanks to the middle of the road.

"It'th a fine morning, Mr. Gourlay," he simpered.

"There's noathing wrong with the morning," grunted Gourlay, as if there was something wrong with the Deacon.

"We wath wanting to thee ye on a very important matter, Mithter Gourlay," lisped the Deacon, smiling up at the big man's face, with his head on one side, and rubbing his fingers in front of him. "It'th a matter of the common good, you thee; and we all agreed

that we should speak to *you*, ath the foremost merchant of the town!"

Allardyce meant his compliment to fetch Gourlay. But Gourlay knew his Allardyce and was cautious. It was well to be on your guard when the Deacon was complimentary. When his language was most flowery there was sure to be a serpent hidden in it somewhere. He would lisp out an innocent remark and toddle away, and Gourlay would think nothing of the matter till a week afterwards, perhaps, when something would flash a light —then "Damn him, did he mean '*that*'?" he would seethe, starting back and staring at the "*that*" while his fingers strangled the air in place of the Deacon.

He glowered at the Deacon now till the Deacon blinked.

"You thee, Mr. Gourlay," Allardyce shuffled uneasily, "it's for your own benefit just ath much ath ourth. We were thinking of you ath well ath of ourthelves! Oh, yeth, oh, yeth!"

"Aye, man!" said Gourlay, "that was kind of ye! I'll be the first man in Barbie to get ainy benefit from the fools that mismanage our affairs."

The gravel grated beneath the Provost's foot. The atmosphere was becoming electric, and the Deacon hastened to the point.

"You thee, there'th a fine natural supply of water—a perfect reservore the Provost sayth—on the brae-face just above *your* garden, Mr. Gourlay. Now, it would be easy to lead that water down and alang through all the gardenth on the high side of Main Street—and, 'deed, it might feed a pump at the Cross, too, to supply the lower portionth o' the town. It would really be a

grai-ait convenience.—Every man on the high side o' Main Street would have a running spout at his own back door! If your garden didna run tho far back, Mr. Gourlay, and ye hadna tho muckle land about your place "—*that* should fetch him, thought the Deacon!—" if it werena for that, Mr. Gourlay, we could easily lead the water round to the other gardenth without interfering with your property. But, ath it ith, we simply cannoat move without ye. The water must come through your garden, if it comes at a-all."

" The most o' you important men live on the high side o' Main Street," birred Gourlay. " Is it the poor folk at the Cross, or your ain bits o' back doors that you're thinking o'? "

" Oh—oh, Mr. Gourlay! " protested Allardyce, head flung back, and palms in air, to keep the thought of self-interest away, " oh—oh, Mr. Gourlay! We're thinking of noathing but the common good, I do assure ye."

"Aye, man! You're dis-in-ter-ested! " said Gourlay, but he stumbled on the big word and spoiled the sneer. That angered him, and, " it's likely," he rapped out, " that I'll allow the land round *my* house to be howked and trenched and made a mudhole of, to oblige a wheen things like you! "

" Oh—oh, but think of the convenience to uth—eh—eh—I mean to the common good," said Allardyce.

" I howked wells for myself," snapped Gourlay. " Let others do the like."

" Oh, but we haven't all the enterprithe of you, Mr. Gourlay. You'll surely accommodate the town! "

" I'll see the town damned first," said Gourlay, and passed on his steady way.

VI

THE bodies watched Gourlay in silence until he was out of ear-shot. Then, "It's monstrous!" the Provost broke out in solemn anger; "I declare it's perfectly monstrous! But I believe we could get Pow-ers to compel him. Yass; I believe we could get Pow-ers. I do believe we could get Pow-ers."

The Provost was fond of talking about "Pow-ers" because it implied that he was intimate with the great authorities who might delegate such "Pow-ers" to him. To talk of "Pow-ers," mysteriously, was a tribute to his own importance. He rolled the word on his tongue as if he enjoyed the sound of it.

On the Deacon's cheek bones two red spots flamed, round and big as a Scotch penny. His was the hurt silence of the baffled diplomatist, to whom a defeat means reflections on his own ability.

"Demn him!" he skirled, following the solid march of his enemy with fiery eyes.

Never before had his Deaconship been heard to swear. Tam Wylie laughed at the shrill oath till his eyes were buried in his merry wrinkles, a suppressed snirt, a continuous gurgle in the throat and nose, in beaming survey the while of the withered old creature dancing in his rage. (It was all a good joke to Tam, because, living on the outskirts of the town, he had no spigot of his

own to feed.) The Deacon turned the eyes of hate on him. Demn Wylie too,—what was he laughing at!

"Oh, I darethay you could have got round him!" he snapped.

"In my opinion, Allardyce," said the baker, "you mismanaged the whole affair. Yon wasna the way to approach him!"

"It'th a pity you didna try your hand, then, I'm sure! No doubt a clever man like *you* would have worked wonderth!"

So the bodies wrangled among themselves. Somehow or other Gourlay had the knack of setting them by the ears. It was not till they hit on a common topic of their spite in railing at him, that they became a band of brothers and a happy few.

"Whisht!" said Sandy Toddle, suddenly, "here's his boy!"

John was coming towards them on his way to school. The bodies watched him as he passed, with the fixed look men turn on a boy of whose kinsmen they were talking even now. They affect a stony and deliberate regard, partly to include the new-comer in their critical survey of his family, and partly to banish from their own eyes any sign that they have just been running down his people. John, as quick as his mother to feel, knew in a moment they were watching *him*. He hung his head sheepishly and blushed, and the moment he was past he broke into a nervous trot, the bag of books bumping on his back as he ran.

"He's getting a big boy, that son of Gourlay's," said the Provost, "how oald will he be?"

"He's approaching twelve," said Johnny Coe, who

made a point of being able to supply such news because it gained him consideration where he was otherwise unheeded. "He was born the day the brig on the Fleckie Road gaed down, in the year o' the great flood; and since the great flood it's twelve year come Lammas. Rab Tosh o' Fleckie's wife was heavy-footed at the time, and Doctor Munn had been a' nicht wi' her, and when he cam to Barbie Water in the morning it was roaring wide frae bank to brae; where the brig should have been there was naething but the swashing of the yellow waves. Munn had to drive a' the way round to the Fechars brig, and in parts o' the road the water was so deep that it lapped his horse's bellyband. A' this time Mrs. Gourlay was skirling in her pains and praying to God she micht dee. Gourlay had been a great crony o' Munn's, but he quarrelled him for being late; he had trysted him, ye see, for the occasion, and he had been twenty times at the yett to look for him,—ye ken how little he would stomach that; he was ready to brust wi' anger. Munn, mad for the want of sleep and wat to the bane, swüre back at him; and than Gourlay wadna let him near his wife! Ye mind what an awful day it was; the thunder roared as if the heavens were tumbling on the world, and the lichtnin sent the trees daudin on the roads, and folk hid below their beds and prayed—they thocht it was the Judgment! But Gourlay rammed his black stepper in the shafts, and drave like the devil o' hell to Skeighan Drone, where there was a young doctor. The lad was feared to come, but Gourlay swore by God that he should, and he garred him. In a' the countryside driving like his that day was never kenned or heard tell o'; they were back within the hour!

I saw them gallop up Main Street; lichtnin struck the ground before them; the young doctor covered his face wi' his hands, and the horse nichered wi' fear and tried to wheel, but Gourlay stood up in the gig and lashed him on through the fire. It was thocht for lang that Mrs. Gourlay would die; and she was never the same woman after. Atweel aye, sirs, Gourlay has that morning's work to blame for the poor wife he has now. Him and Munn never spoke to each other again, and Munn died within the twelvemonth,—he got his death that morning on the Fleckie Road. But, for a' so pack's they had been, Gourlay never looked near him."

Coe had told his story with enjoying gusto, and had told it well—for Johnny, though constantly snubbed by his fellows, was in many ways the ablest of them all. His voice and manner drove it home. They knew, besides, he was telling what himself had seen. For they knew he was lying prostrate with fear in the open smiddyshed from the time Gourlay went to Skeighan Drone to the time that he came back; and that he had seen him both come and go. They were silent for a while, impressed, in spite of themselves, by the vivid presentment of Gourlay's manhood on the day that had scared them all. The baker felt inclined to cry out on his cruelty for keeping his wife suffering to gratify his wrath; but the sudden picture of the man's courage changed that feeling to another of admiring awe; a man so defiant of the angry heavens might do anything. And so with the others; they hated Gourlay, but his bravery was a fact of nature which they could not disregard; they knew themselves smaller and said nothing for a while. Tam Brodie, the most brutal among them,

was the first to recover. Even he did not try to belittle at once, but he felt the subtle discomfort of the situation, and relieved it by bringing the conversation back to its usual channel.

"That was at the boy's birth, Mr. Coe?" said he.

"Ou, aye, just the laddie. It was a' richt when the lassie came. It was Doctor Dandy brocht *her* hame, for Munn was deid by that time, and Dandy had his place."

"What will Gourlay be going to make of him?" the Provost asked. "A doctor or a minister or wha-at?"

"Deil a fear of that," said Brodie; "he'll take him into the business! It's a' that he's fit for. He's an infernal dunce, just his father owre again, and the Dominie thrashes him remorseless! I hear my own weans speaking o't. Ou, it seems he's just a perfect numbskull!"

"Ye couldn't expect ainything else from a son of Gourlay," said the Provost.

Conversation languished. Some fillip was needed to bring it to an easy flow, and the simultaneous scrape of their feet turning round showed the direction of their thoughts.

"A dram would be very acceptable now," murmured Sandy Toddle, rubbing his chin.

"Ou, we wouldna be the waur o't," said Tam Wylie.

"We would all be the better of a little drope," smirked the Deacon.

And they made for the Red Lion for the matutinal dram.

VII

JOHN GOURLAY, the younger, was late for school, in spite of the nervous trot he fell into when he shrank from the bodies' hard stare at him. There was nothing unusual about that; he was late for school every other day. To him it was a howling wilderness where he played a most appropriate rôle. If his father was not about he would hang round his mother till the last moment, rather than be off to old "Bleach-the-boys"—as the master had been christened by his scholars. "Mother, I have a pain in *my* heid," he would whimper, and she would condole with him and tell him she would keep him at home with her—were it not for dread of her husband. She was quite sure he was ainything but strong, poor boy, and that the schooling was bad for him; for it was really remarkable how quickly the pain went if he was allowed to stay at home; why, he got better just directly! It was not often she dared to keep him from school, however, and if she did, she had to hide him from his father.

On school mornings the boy shrank from going out with a shrinking that was almost physical. When he stole through the Green Gate with his bag slithering at his hip (not braced between the shoulders like a birkie scholar's) he used to feel ruefully that he was in for it now—and the Lord alone knew what he would have to put up with ere he came home! And he always had

the feeling of a freed slave when he passed the gate on his return, never failing to note with delight the clean smell of the yard after the stuffiness of school, sucking it in through glad nostrils, and thinking to himself, "Oh, crickey, it's fine to be home!" On Friday nights, in particular, he used to feel so happy that, becoming arrogant, he would try his hand at bullying Jock Gilmour in imitation of his father. John's dislike of school, and fear of its trampling bravoes, attached him peculiarly to the House with the Green Shutters; there was his doting mother, and she gave him stories to read, and the place was so big that it was easy to avoid his father and have great times with the rabbits and the doos. He was as proud of the sonsy house as Gourlay himself, if for a different reason, and he used to boast of it to his comrades. And he never left it, then or after, without a foreboding.

As he crept along the School Road with a rueful face, he was alone, for Janet, who was cleverer than he, was always earlier at school. The absence of children in the sunny street lent to his depression. He felt forlorn; if there had been a chattering crowd marching along, he would have been much more at his ease.

Quite recently the school had been fitted up with varnished desks, and John, who inherited his mother's nervous senses with his father's lack of wit, was always intensely alive to the smell of the desks the moment he went in; and as his heart always sank when he went in, the smell became associated in his mind with that sinking of the heart,—to feel it, no matter where, filled him with uneasiness. As he stole past the joiner's on that sunny morning, when wood was resinous and

pungent of odour, he was suddenly conscious of a varnishy smell, and felt a misgiving without knowing why. It was years after, in Edinburgh, ere he knew the reason; he found that he never went past an upholsterer's shop, on a hot day in spring, without being conscious of a vague depression, and feeling like a boy slinking into school.

In spite of his forebodings nothing more untoward befell him that morning than a cut over the cowering shoulders for being late, as he crept to the bottom of his class. He reached "leave," the ten minutes' run at twelve o'clock, without misadventure. Perhaps it was this unwonted good fortune that made him boastful, when he crouched near the pump among his cronies, sitting on his hunkers with his back to the wall. Half a dozen boys were about him, and Swipey Broon was in front, making mud pellets in a trickle from the pump.

He began talking of the new range.

"Yah! Auld Gemmell needn't have let welp at *me* for being late this morning," he spluttered big-eyed, nodding his head in aggrieved and solemn protest. "It wasna *my* faut! We're getting in a grand new range, and the whole of the kitchen fireplace has been gutted out to make room for't, and my mother couldna get my breakfast in time this morning, because, ye see, she had to boil everything in the parlour—and here, when she gaed ben the house, the parlour fire was out!

"It's to be a splendid range, the new one," he went on, with a conceited jerk of the head. "Peter Riney's bringin'd from Skeighan in the afternune. My father says there winna be its equal in the parish!"

The faces of the boys lowered uncomfortably. They

felt it was a silly thing of Gourlay to blow his own trumpet in this way, but, being boys, they could not prick his conceit with a quick rejoinder. It is only grown-ups who can be ironical; physical violence is the boy's repartee. It had scarcely gone far enough for that yet, so they lowered in uncomfortable silence.

"We're aye getting new things up at our place," he went on. "I heard my father telling Gibson the builder he must have everything of the best! Mother says it'll all be mine some day. I'll have the fine times when I leave the schule,—and that winna be long now, for I'm clean sick o't; I'll no bide a day longer than I need! I'm to go into the business, and then I'll have the times; I'll dash about the country in a gig wi' two dogs wallopping ahin'. I'll have the great life o't."

"Ph-tt!" said Swipey Broon, and planted a gob of mud right in the middle of his brow.

"Hoh! hoh! hoh!" yelled the others. They hailed Swipey's action with delight because, to their minds, it exactly met the case. It was the one fit retort to his bouncing.

Beneath the wet plunk of the mud John started back, bumping his head against the wall behind him. The sticky pellet clung to his brow, and he brushed it angrily aside. The laughter of the others added to his wrath against Swipey.

"What are you after?" he bawled. "Don't try your tricks on me, Swipey Broon. Man, I could kill ye wi' a glower!"

In a twinkling Swipey's jacket was off and he was dancing in his shirt sleeves, inviting Gourlay to come on and try't.

"G'way, man," said John, his face as white as the wall; "g'way, man! Don't have *me* getting up to ye, or I'll knock the fleas out of your duds!"

Now the father of Swipey—so called because he always swiped when batting at rounders—the father of Swipey was the rag and bone merchant of Barbie, and it was said (with what degree of truth I know not) that his home was verminous in consequence. John's taunt was calculated, therefore, to sting him to the quick.

The scion of the Broons, fired for the honour of his house, drove straight at the mouth of the insulter. But John jouked to the side, and Swipey skinned his knuckles on the wall.

For a moment he rocked to and fro, doubled up in pain, crying "*Ooh!*" with a rueful face, and squeezing his hand between his thighs to dull its sharper agonies. Then, with redoubled wrath bold Swipey hurled him at the foe. He grabbed Gourlay's head and, shoving it down between his knees, proceeded to pummel his bent back, while John bellowed angrily (from between Swipey's legs), "Let me up, see!"

Swipey let him up. John came at him with whirling arms, but Swipey jouked and gave him one on the mouth that split his lip. In another moment Gourlay was grovelling on his hands and knees, and triumphant Swipey, astride his back, was bellowing "Hurroo!"—Swipey's father was an Irishman.

"Let him up, Broon!" cried Peter Wylie. "Let him up, and meet each other square!"

"Oh, I'll let him up," cried Swipey and leapt to his feet with magnificent pride. He danced round Gourlay with his fists sawing the air. "I could fight ten of him!

Come on, Gourlay!" he cried, "and I'll poultice the road wi' your brose."

John rose, glaring. But when Swipey rushed he turned and fled. The boys ran into the middle of the street, pointing after the coward and shouting, "Yeh! Yeh! Yeh!" with the infinite cruel derision of boyhood.

"Yeh! Yeh! Yeh!" the cries of execration and contempt pursued him as he ran.

Ere he had gone a hundred yards he heard the shrill whistle with which Mr. Gemmell summoned his scholars from their play.

VIII

ALL the children had gone into school. The street was lonely in the sudden stillness. The joiner slanted across the road, brushing shavings and sawdust from his white apron. There was no other sign of life in the sunshine. Only from the smiddy, far away, came at times the tink of an anvil.

John crept on up the street, keeping close to the wall. It seemed unnatural being there at that hour; everything had a quiet unfamiliar look. The white walls of the houses reproached the truant with their silent faces.

A strong smell of wall flowers oozed through the hot air. John thought it a lonely smell and ran to get away.

"Johnny dear, what's wrong wi' ye?" cried his mother, when he stole in through the scullery at last. "Are ye ill, dear?"

"I wanted to come hame," he said. It was no defence; it was the sad and simple expression of his wish.

"What for, my sweet?"

"I hate the school," he said, bitterly; "I aye want to be at hame."

His mother saw his cut mouth.

"Johnny," she cried in concern, "what's the matter with your lip, dear? Has ainybody been meddling ye?"

"It was Swipey Broon," he said.

"Did ever a body hear?" she cried. "Things have come to a fine pass when decent weans canna go to the school without a wheen rag-folk yoking on them! But what can a body ettle? Scotland's not what it used to be! It's owrerun wi' the dirty Eerish!"

In her anger she did not see the sloppy dishclout on the scullery chair, on which she sank exhausted by her rage.

"Oh, but I let him have it," swaggered John. "I threatened to knock the fleas off him. The other boys were on *his* side, or I would have walloped him."

"Atweel, they would a' be on his side," she cried. "But it's juist envy, Johnny. Never mind, dear; you'll soon be left the school, and there's not wan of them has the business that you have waiting ready to step intil."

"Mother," he pleaded, "let me bide here for the rest o' the day!"

"Oh, but your father, Johnny? If *he* saw ye!"

"If you gie me some o' your novelles to look at, I'll go up to the garret and hide, and ye can ask Jenny no to tell."

She gave him a hunk of nuncheon and a bundle of her novelettes, and he stole up to an empty garret and squatted on the bare boards. The sun streamed through the skylight window and lay, an oblong patch, in the centre of the floor. John noted the head of a nail that stuck gleaming up. He could hear the pigeons *rooketty-cooing* on the roof, and every now and then a slithering sound, as they lost their footing on the slates and went sliding downward to the rones. But for that, all was still, uncannily still. Once a zinc pail clanked in the

yard, and he started with fear, wondering if that was his faither!

If young Gourlay had been the right kind of a boy he would have been in his glory, with books to read and a garret to read them in. For to snuggle close beneath the slates is as dear to the boy as the bard, if somewhat diverse their reasons for seclusion. Your garret is the true kingdom of the poet, neighbouring the stars; side-windows tether him to earth, but a skylight looks to the heavens. (That is why so many poets live in garrets, no doubt.) But it is the secrecy of a garret for him and his books that a boy loves; there he is lord of his imagination; there, when the impertinent world is hidden from his view, he rides with great Turpin at night beneath the glimmer of the moon. What boy of sense would read about Turpin in a mere respectable parlour? A hayloft's the thing, where you can hide in a dusty corner, and watch through a chink the baffled minions of Bow Street, and hear Black Bess—good jade!—stamping in her secret stall, and be ready to descend when a friendly ostler cries, "Jericho!" But if there is no hayloft at hand a mere garret will do very well. And so John should have been in his glory,—as indeed for a while he was. But he shewed his difference from the right kind of a boy by becoming lonely. He had inherited from his mother a silly kind of interest in silly books, but to him reading was a painful process, and he could never remember the plot. What he liked best (though he could not have told you about it) was a vivid physical picture. When the puffing steam of Black Bess's nostrils cleared away from the moonlit pool, and the white face of the dead man stared at Turpin through

the water, John saw it and shivered, staring big-eyed at the staring horror. He was alive to it all; he heard the seep of the water through the mare's lips, and its hollow glug as it went down, and the creak of the saddle beneath Turpin's hip; he saw the smear of sweat roughening the hair on her slanting neck, and the great steaming breath she blew out when she rested from drinking, and then that awful face glaring from the pool.—Perhaps he was not so far from being the right kind of boy, after all, since that was the stuff that *he* liked.—He wished he had some Turpin with him now, for his mother's periodicals were all about men with impossibly broad shoulders and impossibly curved waists who asked Angelina if she loved them. Once, it is true, a somewhat too florid sentence touched him on the visual nerve: "Through a chink in the Venetian blind a long pencil of yellow light pierced the beautiful dimness of the room and pointed straight to the dainty bronze slipper peeping from under Angelina's gown; it became a slipper of vivid gold amid the gloom." John saw that and brightened, but the next moment they began to talk about love and he was at sea immediately. "Dagon them and their love!" quoth he.

To him, indeed, reading was never more than a means of escape from something else; he never thought of a book so long as there were things to see. Some things were different from others, it is true. Things of the outer world, where he swaggered among his fellows and was thrashed, or bungled his lessons and was thrashed again, imprinted themselves vividly on his mind, and he hated the impressions. When Swipey Broon was hot the sweat pores always glistened distinctly on the end

of his mottled nose—John, as he thought angrily of Swipey this afternoon, saw the glistening sweat pores before him and wanted to bash them. The varnishy smell of the desks, the smell of the wallflowers at Mrs. Manzie's on the way to school, the smell of the school itself—to all these he was morbidly alive, and he loathed them. But he loved the impressions of his home. His mind was full of perceptions of which he was unconscious, till he found one of them recorded in a book, and that was the book for him. The curious physical always drew his mind to hate it or to love. In summer he would crawl into the bottom of an old hedge, among the black mould and the withered sticks, and watch a red-ended beetle creep slowly up a bit of wood till near the top, and fall suddenly down, and creep patiently again,—this he would watch with curious interest and remember always. "Johnny," said his mother once, "what do you breenge into the bushes to watch those nasty things for?"

"They're queer," he said musingly.

Even if he *was* a little dull wi' the book, she was sure he would come to something, for, eh, he was such a noticing boy.

But there was nothing to touch him in "The Wooing of Angeline"; he was moving in an alien world. It was a complicated plot, and, some of the numbers being lost, he was not sharp enough to catch the idea of the story. He read slowly and without interest. The sounds of the outer world reached him in his loneliness and annoyed him, because, while wondering what they were, he dared not look out to see. He heard the rattle of wheels entering the big yard; that would be Peter Riney back

from Skeighan with the range. Once he heard the birr of his father's voice in the lobby and his mother speaking in shrill protest, and then—oh, horror!—his father came up the stair. Would he come into the garret? John, lying on his left side, felt his quickened heart thud against the boards, and he could not take his big frighted eyes from the bottom of the door. But the heavy step passed and went into another room. John's open mouth was dry, and his shirt was sticking to his back.

The heavy steps came back to the landing.

"Whaur's *my* gimlet?" yelled his father down the stair.

"Oh, I lost the corkscrew, and took it to open a bottle," cried his mother, wearily. "Here it is, man, in the kitchen drawer."

"*Hañ!*" his father barked, and he knew he was infernal angry. If he should come in!

But he went tramping down the stair, and John, after waiting till his pulses were stilled, resumed his reading. He heard the masons in the kitchen, busy with the range, and he would have liked fine to watch them, but he dared not go down till after four. It was lonely up here by himself. A hot wind had sprung up, and it crooned through the keyhole drearily; "*oo-woo-oo*," it cried, and the sound drenched him in a vague depression. The splotch of yellow light had shifted round to the fireplace; Janet had kindled a fire there last winter, and the ashes had never been removed, and now the light lay, yellow and vivid, on a red clinker of coal, and a charred piece of stick. A piece of glossy white paper had been flung in the untidy grate, and in the hollow

curve of it a thin silt of black dust had gathered—the light shewed it plainly. All these things the boy marked and was subtly aware of their unpleasantness. He was forced to read to escape the sense of them. But it was words, words, words that he read; the substance mattered not at all. His head leaned heavy on his left hand and his mouth hung open, as his eye travelled dreamily along the lines. He succeeded in hypnotizing his brain at last, by the mere process of staring at the page.

At last he heard Janet in the lobby. That meant that school was over. He crept down the stair.

"*You* were playing the truant," said Janet, and she nodded her head in accusation. "I've a good mind to tell my faither."

"If ye wud—" he said, and shook his fist at her threateningly. She shrank away from him. They went into the kitchen together.

The range had been successfully installed, and Mr. Gourlay was shewing it to Grant of Loranogie, the foremost farmer of the shire. Mrs. Gourlay, standing by the kitchen table, viewed her new possession with a faded simper of approval. She was pleased that Mr. Grant should see the grand new thing that they had gotten. She listened to the talk of the men with a faint smile about her weary lips, her eyes upon the sonsy range.

"Dod, it's a handsome piece of furniture," said Loranogie. "How did ye get it brought here, Mr. Gourlay?"

"I went to Glasgow and ordered it special. It came to Skeighan by the train, and my own beasts brought

it owre. That fender's a feature," he added, complacently; " it's onusual wi' a range."

The massive fender ran from end to end of the fireplace, projecting a little in front; its rim, a square bar of heavy steel, with bright sharp edges.

" And that poker, too; man, there's a history wi' that. I made a point of the making o't. He was an ill-bred little whalp, the bodie in Glasgow. I happened to say till um I would like a poker-heid just the same size as the rim of the fender! ' What d'ye want wi' a heavy-heided poker? ' says he; ' a' ye need's a bit sma' thing to rype the ribs wi'.' ' Is that so? ' says I. ' How do *you* ken what *I* want? ' I made short work o' *him!* The poker-heid's the identical size o' the rim; I had it made to fit! "

Loranogie thought it a silly thing of Gourlay to concern himself about a poker. But that was just like him, of course. The moment the body in Glasgow opposed his whim, Gourlay, he knew, would make a point o't.

The grain merchant took the bar of heavy metal in his hand. " Dod, it's an awful weapon," he said, meaning to be jocose. " You could murder a man wi't."

" Deed you could," said Loranogie; " you could kill him wi' the one lick."

The elders, engaged with more important matters, paid no attention to the children, who had pushed between them to the front and were looking up at their faces, as they talked, with curious watching eyes. John, with his instinct to notice things, took the poker up when his father laid it down, to see if it was really the size of the rim. It was too heavy for him to raise by the handle; he had to lift it by the middle. Janet was

at his elbow, watching him. "You could kill a man with that," he told her, importantly, though she had heard it for herself. Janet stared and shuddered. Then the boy laid the poker-head along the rim, fitting edge to edge with a nice precision.

"Mother," he cried, turning towards her in his interest, "Mother, look here! It's exactly the same size!"

"Put it down, sir," said his father with a grim smile at Loranogie. "You'll be killing folk next."

IX

"ARE ye packit, Peter?" said Gourlay.

"Yes, sir," said Peter Riney, running round to the other side of a cart, to fasten a horse's bellyband to the shaft. "Yes, sir, we're a' ready."

"Have the carriers a big load?"

"Andy has just a wheen parcels, but Elshie's as fu' as he can haud. And there's a gey pickle stuff waiting at the Cross."

The hot wind of yesterday had brought lightning through the night, and this morning there was the gentle drizzle that sometimes follows a heavy thunderstorm. Hints of the further blue shewed themselves in a lofty sky of delicate and drifting grey. The blackbirds and thrushes welcomed the cooler air with a gush of musical piping, as if the liquid tenderness of the morning had actually got into their throats and made them softer.

"You had better snoove away then," said Gourlay. "Donnerton's five mile ayont Fleckie, and by the time you deliver the meal there, and load the ironwork, it'll be late ere you get back. Snoove away, Peter; snoove away!"

Peter shuffled uneasily, and his pale blue eyes blinked at Gourlay from beneath their grizzled crow nests of red hair.

"Are we a' to start thegither, sir?" he hesitated. "D'ye mean—d'ye mean the carriers, too?"

"Atweel, Peter!" said Gourlay. "What for no?"

Peter took a great old watch, with a yellow case, from his fob, and, "It wants a while o' aicht, sir," he volunteered.

"Aye, man, Peter, and what of that?" said Gourlay.

There was almost a twinkle in his eye. Peter Riney was the only human being with whom he was ever really at his ease. It is only when a mind feels secure in itself that it can laugh unconcernedly at others. Peter was so simple that in his presence Gourlay felt secure; and he used to banter him.

"The folk at the Cross winna expect the carriers till aicht, sir," said Peter, "and I doubt their stuff won't be ready."

"Aye, man, Peter!" Gourlay joked lazily, as if Peter was a little boy. "Aye, man, Peter! You think the folk at the Cross winna be prepared?"

"No, sir," said Peter, opening his eyes very solemnly, "they winna be prepared."

"It'll do them good to hurry a little for once," growled Gourlay, humour yielding to spite at the thought of his enemies. "It'll do them good to hurry a little for once! Be off, the lot of ye!"

After ordering his carriers to start, to back down and postpone their departure, just to suit the convenience of his neighbours, would derogate from his own importance. His men might think he was afraid of Barbie.

He strolled out to the big gate and watched his teams going down the brae.

There were only four carts this morning because the two that had gone to Fechars yesterday with the cheese

would not be back till the afternoon; and another had already turned west to Auchterwheeze, to bring slates for the flesher's new house. Of the four that went down the street two were the usual carrier's carts, the other two were off to Fleckie with meal, and Gourlay had started them the sooner since they were to bring back the ironwork which Templandmuir needed for his new improvements. Though the Templar had reformed greatly since he married his birkie wife, he was still far from having his place in proper order, and he had often to depend on Gourlay for the carrying of stuff which a man in his position should have had horses of his own to bring.

As Gourlay stood at his gate he pondered with heavy cunning how much he might charge Templandmuir for bringing the ironwork from Fleckie. He decided to charge him for the whole day, though half of it would be spent in taking his own meal to Donnerton. In that he was carrying out his usual policy—which was to make each side of his business help the other.

As he stood puzzling his wits over Templandmuir's account, his lips worked in and out, to assist the slow process of his brain. His eyes narrowed between peering lids, and their light seemed to turn inward as he fixed them abstractedly on a stone in the middle of the road. His head was tilted that he might keep his eyes upon the stone; and every now and then, as he mused, he rubbed his chin slowly between the thumb and fingers of his left hand. Entirely given up to the thought of Templandmuir's account he failed to see the figure advancing up the street.

At last the scrunch of a boot on the wet road struck

his ear. He turned with his best glower on the man who was approaching; more of the "Wha-the-bleezes-are-you?" look than ever in his eyes—because he had been caught unawares.

The stranger wore a light yellow overcoat, and he had been walking a long time in the rain, apparently, for the shoulders of the coat were quite black with the wet, these black patches showing in strong contrast with the dryer, therefore yellower, front of it. Coat and jacket were both hanging slightly open, and between was seen the slight bulge of a dirty white waistcoat. The newcomer's trousers were turned high at the bottom, and the muddy spats he wore looked big and ungainly in consequence. In his appearance there was an air of dirty and pretentious well-to-do-ness. It was not shabby gentility. It was like the gross attempt at dress of your well-to-do publican who looks down on his soiled white waistcoat with complacent and approving eye.

"It's a fine morning, Mr. Gourlay!" simpered the stranger. His air was that of a forward tenant who thinks it a great thing to pass remarks on the weather with his laird.

Gourlay cast a look at the dropping heavens.

"Is that *your* opinion?" said he. "I fail to see't mysell."

It was not in Gourlay to see the beauty of that grey wet dawn. A fine morning to him was one that burnt the back of your neck.

The stranger laughed; a little deprecating giggle. "I meant it was fine weather for the fields," he explained. He had meant nothing of the kind, of course;

he had merely been talking at random in his wish to be civil to that important man, John Gourlay.

"Imphm," he pondered, looking round on the weather with a wise air; "Imphm; it's fine weather for the fields!"

"Are *you* a farmer then?" Gourlay nipped him, with his eye on the white waistcoat.

"Oh—oh, Mr. Gourlay! A farmer, no. Hi—hi! I'm not a farmer. I daresay, now, you have no mind of *me!*"

"No," said Gourlay, regarding him very gravely and steadily with his dark eyes. "I cannot say, sir, that I have the pleasure of remembering *you!*"

"Man, I'm a son of auld John Wilson of Brigabee!"

"Oh, auld Wilson, the mole-catcher!" said contemptuous Gourlay. "What's this they christened him now? 'Toddling Johnnie,' was it noat?"

Wilson coloured. But he sniggered to gloss over the awkwardness of the remark. A coward always sniggers when insulted, pretending that the insult is only a joke of his opponent, and therefore to be laughed aside. So he escapes the quarrel which he fears a show of displeasure might provoke.

But, though Wilson was not a hardy man, it was not timidity only that caused his tame submission to Gourlay.

He had come back after an absence of fifteen years, with a good deal of money in his pocket, and he had a fond desire that he, the son of the mole-catcher, should get some recognition of his prosperity from the most important man in the locality. If Gourlay had said, with solemn and fat-lipped approval, "Man, I'm glad to see that you have done so well!" he would have swelled

with gratified pride. For it is often the favourable estimate of their own little village—"What they'll think of me at home"—that matters most to Scotsmen who go out to make their way in the world. No doubt that is why so many of them go home and cut a dash when they have made their fortunes; they want the cronies of their youth to see the big men they have become. Wilson was not exempt from that weakness. As far back as he remembered Gourlay had been the big man of Barbie; as a boy he had viewed him with admiring awe; to be received by him now, as one of the well-to-do, were a sweet recognition of his greatness. It was a fawning desire for that recognition that caused his smirking approach to the grain merchant. So strong was the desire that, though he coloured and felt awkward at the contemptuous reference to his father, he sniggered and went on talking, as if nothing untoward had been said. He was one of the band impossible to snub, not because they are endowed with superior moral courage, but because their easy self-importance is so great, that an insult rarely pierces it enough to divert them from their purpose. They walk through life wrapped comfortably round in the wool of their own conceit. Gourlay, though a dull man—perhaps because he was a dull man—suspected insult in a moment. But it rarely entered Wilson's brain (though he was cleverer than most) that the world could find anything to scoff at in such a fine fellow as James Wilson. A less ironic brute than Gourlay would never have pierced the thickness of his hide. It was because Gourlay succeeded in piercing it that morning, that Wilson hated him for ever—with a hate the more bitter because he was rebuffed so seldom.

"Is business brisk?" he asked, irrepressible.

Business! Heavens, did ye hear him talking? What did Toddling Johnny's son know about business? What was the world coming to? To hear him setting up his face there, and asking the best merchant in the town whether business was brisk! It was high time to put him in his place, the conceited upstart, shoving himself forward like an equal!

For it was the assumption of equality implied by Wilson's manner that offended Gourlay—as if mole-catcher's son and monopolist were discussing, on equal terms, matters of interest to them both.

"Business!" he said gravely. "Well, I'm not well acquainted with your line, but I believe mole traps are cheap—if ye have any idea of taking up the oald trade!"

Wilson's eyes flickered over him, hurt and dubious. His mouth opened—then shut—then he decided to speak after all. "Oh, I was thinking Barbie would be very quiet," said he, "compared wi' places where they have the railway! I was thinking it would need stirring up a bit."

"Oh, ye was thinking that, was ye?" birred Gourlay, with a stupid man's repetition of his jibe. "Well; I believe there's a grand opening in the moleskin line, so *there's* a chance for ye! My quarrymen wear out their breeks in no time!"

Wilson's face, which had swelled with red shame, went a dead white. "Good-morning!" he said, and started rapidly away with a vicious dig of his stick upon the wet road.

"Goo-ood mor-r-ning, serr!" Gourlay birred after him; "Goo-ood mor-r-ning, serr!" He felt he had

been bright this morning. He had put the branks on Wilson!

Wilson was as furious at himself as at Gourlay. Why the devil had he said "Good morning?" It had slipped out of him unawares, and Gourlay had taken it up with an ironic birr that rang in his ears now, poisoning his blood. He felt equal in fancy to a thousand Gourlays now—so strong was he in wrath against him. He had gone forward to pass pleasant remarks about the weather, and why should he noat?—he was no disgrace to Barbie, but a credit rather. It was not every working man's son that came back with five hundred in the bank. And here Gourlay had treated him like a doag! Ah, well, he would maybe be upsides with Gourlay yet, so he might!

X

"SUCH a rickle of furniture I never saw!" said the Provost.

"Whose is it?" said Brodie.

"Oh, have ye noat heard?" said the Head of the Town with eyebrows in air. "It beloangs to that fellow Wilson, doan't ye know? He's a son of oald Wilson, the mowdie-man of Brigabee. It seems we're to have him for a neighbour, or all's bye wi't. I declare I doan't know what this world's coming to!"

"Man, Provost," said Brodie, "d'ye tell me tha-at? I've been over at Fleckie for the last ten days—my brother Rab's dead and won away, as I daresay you have heard—oh, yes, we must all go—so, ye see, I'm scarcely abreast o' the latest intelligence. What's Wilson doing here? I thought he had been a pawnbroker in Embro."

"Noat he! It's *whispered* indeed, that he left Brigabee to go and help in a pawmbroker's, but it seems he married an Aberdeen lass and sattled there after a while, the manager of a store, I have been given to understaand. He has taken oald Rab Jamieson's barn at the bottom of the Cross—for what purpose it beats even me to tell! And that's his furniture——"

"I declare!" said the astonished Brodie. "He's a smart-looking boy that. Will that be a son of his?"

He pointed to a sharp-faced urchin of twelve who was busy carrying chairs round the corner of the barn, to

the tiny house where Wilson meant to live. He was a red-haired boy with an upturned nose, dressed in shirt and knickerbockers only. The cross of his braces came comically near his neck—so short was the space of shirt between the top line of his breeches and his shoulders. His knickers were open at the knee, and the black stockings below them were wrinkled slackly down his thin legs, being tied loosely above the calf with dirty white strips of cloth instead of garters. He had no cap, and it was seen that his hair had a "cow-lick" in front; it slanted up from his brow, that is, in a sleek kind of tuft. There was a violent squint in one of his sharp grey eyes, so that it seemed to flash at the world across the bridge of his nose. He was so eager at his work that his clumsy-looking boots—they only *looked* clumsy because the legs they were stuck to were so thin—skidded on the cobbles as he whipped round the barn with a chair inverted on his poll. When he came back for another chair, he sometimes wheepled a tune of his own making, in shrill disconnected jerks, and sometimes wiped his nose on his sleeve. And the bodies watched him.

"Faith, he's keen," said the Provost.

"But what on earth has Wilson ta'en auld Jamieson's house and barn for? They have stude empty since I kenna whan," quoth Alexander Toddle, forgetting his English in surprise.

"They say he means to start a business! He's made some bawbees in Aiberdeen, they're telling me, and he thinks he'll set Barbie in a lowe wi't."

"Ou, he means to work a perfect revolution," said Johnny Coe.

"In Barbie!" cried astounded Toddle.

"In Barbie e'en't," said the Provost.

"It would take a heap to revolutionize *hit*," said the baker, the ironic man.

"There's a chance in that hoose," Brodie burst out, ignoring the baker's jibe. "Dod, there's a chance, sirs. I wonder it never occurred to me before."

"Are ye thinking ye have missed a gude thing?" grinned the Deacon.

But Brodie's lips were working in the throes of commercial speculation, and he stared, heedless of the jibe. So Johnny Coe took up his sapient parable.

"Atweel," said he, "there's a chance, Mr. Brodie. That road round to the back's a handy thing. You could take a horse and cart brawly through an opening like that. And there's a gey bit ground at the back, too, when a body comes to think o't."

"What line's he meaning to purshoo?" queried Brodie, whose mind, quickened by the chance he saw at No. 1, The Cross, was hot on the hunt of its possibilities.

"He's been very close about that," said the Provost. "I asked Johnny Gibson—it was him had the selling o't—but he couldn't give me ainy satisfaction. All he could say was that Wilson had bought it and paid it. 'But, losh!' said I, 'he maun 'a' lat peep what he wanted the place for!' But na; it seems he was owre auld-farrant for the like of that. 'We'll let the folk wonder for a while, Mr. Gibson,' he had said. 'The less we tell them, the keener they'll be to ken; and they'll advertise me for noathing by spiering one another what I'm up till.'"