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ON a beautiful evening in September, when a new crescent moon was pointing through the saffron sky like the lit tip of a finger, the City Fathers had assembled at the corner of the Fleekie Road. Though the moon was peeping, the dying glory of the day was still upon the town. The white smoke rose straight and far in the golden mystery of the heavens, and a line of dark roofs, transfigured against the west, wooed the eye to musing. But though the bodies felt the fine evening bathe them in a sensuous content, as they smoked and dawdled, they gave never a thought to its beauty. For there had been a blitheness in the town that day, and every other man seemed to have been preeing the demi-john.

Drucken Wabster and Brown the ragman came round the corner, staggering.

“Young Gourlay’s drunk!” blurted Wabster—and reeled himself as he spoke.

“Is he a wee fou?” said the Deacon eagerly.

“Wee be damned,” said Wabster; “he’s as fou as the Baltic Sea! If you wait here, you’ll be sure to see him! He’ll be round the corner directly.”

“De-ar me, is he so bad as that?” said the ex-Provost, raising his hands in solemn reprobation. He raised his eyes to heaven at the same time, as if it pained them to look on a world that endured the burden of a young

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Gourlay. "In broad daylight, too!" he sighed. "De-ar me, has he come to this?"

"Yis, Pravast," hiccupped Brown, "he has! He's as phull of drink as a whelk-shell's phull of whelk. He's nearly as phull as meself.—And begorra, that's mighty phull," he stared suddenly, scratching his head solemnly as if the fact had just occurred to him. Then he winked.

"You could set fire to his braith!" cried Wabster. "A match to his mouth would send him in a lowe."

"A living gas jet!" said Brown.

They staggered away, sometimes rubbing shoulders as they lurched together, sometimes with the road between them.

"I kenned young Gourlay was on the fuddle when I saw him swinging off this morning in his greatcoat," cried Sandy Toddle. "There was debauch in the flap o' the tails o't."

"Man, have you noticed that, too!" cried another eagerly. "He's aye warst wi' the coat on!"

"Clothes undoubtedly affect the character," said Johnny Coe. "It takes a gentleman to wear a lordly coat without swaggering."

"There's not a doubt o' tha-at!" approved the baker, who was merry with his day's carousal; "there's not a doubt o' tha-at! Claes affect the disposure. I mind when I was a young chap I had a grand pair o' breeks—Wull I ca'ed them—unco decent breeks they were, I mind, lang and swankie like a ploughman—and I aye thocht I was a tremendous honest and hamely fallow when I had them on! And I had a verra disreputable hat," he added—"Rab I christened him for he was a perfect devil—and I never cocked him owre my lug on

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nights at e'en but 'Baker!' he seemed to whisper, 'Baker! Let us go out and do a bash!'—And we generally went."

"You're a wonderful man!" piped the Deacon.

"We may as well wait and see young Gourlay going bye," said the ex-Provost. "He'll likely be a sad spectacle."

"Ith auld Gourlay on the threet the nicht?" cried the Deacon eagerly. "I wonder will he thee the youngster afore he gets hame! Eh, man—" he bent his knees with staring delight—"eh, man, if they would only meet forenenst uth! Hoo!"

"He's a regular waster," said Brodie. "When a silly young blood takes a fancy to a girl in a public house he's always done for—I've observed it times without number. At first he lets on that he merely gangs in for a drink; what he really wants, however, is to see the girl. Even if he's no great toper to begin with, he must show himself fond o' the dram, as a means of getting to his jo. Then, before he kens where he is, the habit has gripped him. That's a gate mony a ane gangs."

"That's verra true—now that ye mention't," gravely assented the ex-Provost. His opinion of Brodie's sagacity, high already, was enhanced by the remark. "Indeed, that's verra true. But how does't apply to young Gourlay in particular, Thomas? Is *he* after some damsel o' the gill-stoup?"

"Ou aye—he's ta'en a fancy to yon bit shilp in the barroom o' the Red Lion. He's always hinging owre the counter talking till her, a cigarette dropping from his face, and a half-fu' tumbler at his elbow. When a young chap takes to hinging round bars, ae elbow on

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the counter and a hand on his other hip, I have verra bad brows o' him always; verra bad brows, indeed. Oh—oh, young Gourlay's just a goner! a goner, sirs; a goner!"

"Have ye heard about him at the Skeighan Fair?" said Sandy Toddle.

"No, man!" said Brodie, bowing down and keeking at Toddle in his interest; "I hadna heard about tha-at! Is this a *new* thing?"

"Oh, just at the fair; the other day, ye know!"

"Aye, man, Sandy!" said big Brodie, stooping down to Toddle to get near the news; "and what was it, Sandy?"

"Ou, just drinking, ye know; wi'—wi' Swipey Broon—and, eh, and that McCraw, ye know—and Sandy Hull—and a wheen mair o' that kind—ye ken the kind; a verra bad lot!" said Sandy, and wagged a disapproving pow. "Here they all got as drunk as drunk could be, and started fighting wi' the colliers! Young Gourlay got a bloodied nose! Then nothing would serve him but he must drive back wi' young Pin-oe, who was even drunker than himsell. They drave at sic a rate that when they dashed from this side o' Skeighan Drone, the stour o' their career was rising at the far-end. They roared and sang till it was a perfect affront to God's day, and frae sidie to sidie they swung till the splash-brods were skreighing on the wheels. At a quick turn o' the road they wintled owre; and there they were, sitting on their dowps in the atoms o' the gig, and glowering frae them! When young Gourlay slid hame at dark, he was in such a state that his mother had to hide him frae the auld man. She had that, puir body! The twa women were

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obliged to carry the drunk lump to his bedroom—and yon lassie far ga'en in consumption, too, they tell me! Ou, he was in a perfectly awful condition; perfectly awful!”

“Aye, man,” nodded Brodie. “I hadna heard o't.—Curious that I didna hear o' that!”

“It was Drucken Wabster's wife that telled it. There's not a haet that happens at the Gourlays but she clypes. I spiered her mysell, and she says young Gourlay has a black eye.”

“Aye, aye; there'th thmall hope for the Gourlayth in *him!*” said the Deacon.

“How do *you* ken?” cried the baker. “He's no the first youngster I've seen the wisecres o' the world wagging their sagacious pows owre; and, eh, but he was *this* waster!—according to their way of it—and, oh, but he was the *other* waster! and, ochonee, but he was the *wild* fellow!—and a' the while they werena fit to be his door mat; for it was only the fire in the ruffian made him seem sae daft.”

“True!” said the ex-Provost; “true! Still there's a decency in daftness. And there's no decency in young Gourlay. He's just a mouth! ‘Start canny and you'll steer weel,’ my mother used to say; but he has started unco ill, and he'll steer to ruin.”

“Dinna spae ill-fortune!” said the baker, “dinna spae ill-fortune! And never despise a youngster for a random start. It's the blood makes a breenge.”

“Well, I like young men to be quiet,” said Sandy Toddle. “I would rather have them a wee soft than rollickers.”

“Not I!” said the baker. “If I had a son, I would

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rather an ill deil sat fornenst me at the table, than par-ratch in a poke. Burns (God rest his banes!) struck the he'rt o't. Ye mind what he said o' Prince Geordie:

“ ‘ Yet mony a ragged cowte's been known
To mak a noble aiver;
And ye may doucely fill a Throne,
For a' their clishmaclaver;
There Him at Agincourt wha shone,
Few better were or braver;
And yet wi' funny queer Sir John
He was an unco shaver
For monie a day.' ”

“ Dam't, but Burns is gude.”

“ Huts man, dinna sweer sae muckle!” frowned the old Provost.

“ Ou, there's waur than an oath now and than,” said the baker. “ Like spice in a bun it lends a briskness. But it needs the hearty manner wi't. The Deacon there couldna let blatter wi' a hearty oath to save his withered sowl. I kenned a trifle o' a fellow that got in among a jovial gang lang-syne that used to sweer tremendous, and he bude to do the same the bit bodie:—so he used to say ‘ *Dim it!* ’ in a wee sma voice that was clean rideec'lous.—He was a lauchable dirt, that.”

“ What was his name?” said Sandy Toddle.

“ Your ain,” said the baker. (To tell the truth, he was gey fou.) “ Alexander Toddle was his name: ‘ *Dim it!* ’ he used to squeak, for he had been a Scotch cuddy in the Midlands, and whiles he used the English. ‘ *Dim it!* ’ said he. I like a man that says ‘ *Dahm't.* ’ ”

“ Aye, but then, you thee, *you're* an artitht in wordth,” said the Deacon.

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“Ye’re an artist in spite,” said the baker.

“Ah, well,” said the ex-Provost, “Burns proved to be wrang in the end o’t, and you’ll maybe be the same. George the Fort’ didna fill the throne verra doucely for a’ their cleishmaclaver, and I don’t think young Gourlay’ll fill the pulpit verra doucely for a’ ours. For he’s saftie and daftie baith—and that’s the deidly combination. At least, that’s my opinion,” quoth he, and smacked his lips, the important man.

“Tyuts,” said the baker, “folk should be kind to folk. There may be a possibeclity for the Gourlays in the youngster yet!”

He would have said more, but at that moment his sony big wife came out, with oh! such a roguish and kindly smile, and, “Tom, Tom,” said she, “what are ye havering here for? C’way in, man, and have a dish o’ tea wi’ me!”

He glanced up at her with comie shrewdness from where he sat on his hunkers—for fine he saw through her—and “Ou aye,” said he, “ye great muckle fat hotch o’ a dacent bodie, ye—I’ll gang in and have a dish o’ tea wi’ ye.” And away went the fine fuddled fellow.

“She’s a wise woman, that,” said the ex-Provost looking after them. “She kenned no to flyte, and he went like a lamb.”

“I believe he’th feared o’ her,” snapped the Deacon, “or he wudny-un went thae lamb-like!”

“Leave him alone!” said Johnny Coe, who had been drinking too. “He’s the only kind heart in Barbie. ‘And Gourlay’s the only gentleman.”

“Gentleman!” cried Sandy Toddle. “Lord save us! ‘Auld Gourlay a gentleman!”

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“Yes, gentleman!” said Johnny, to whom the drink gave a courage. “Brute, if ye like, but aristocrat frae scalp to heel. If he had brains, and a dacent wife, and a bigger field—oh, man,” said Johnny, visioning the possibility, “Auld Gourla could conquer the world, if he swalled his neck till’t.”

“It would be a big conquest that!” said the Deacon. —“Here comes his son taking his ain share o’ the earth at ony rate.”

Young Gourlay came staggering round the corner, “a little sprung” (as they phrase it in Barbie), but not so bad as they had hoped to see him. Webster and the ragman had exaggerated the condition of their fellow-topper. Probably their own oscillation lent itself to everything they saw. John zig-zagged, it is true, but otherwise he was fairly steady on his pins. Unluckily, however, failing to see a stone before on the road, he tripped and went sprawling on his hands and knees. A titter went.

“What the hell are you laughing at?” he snarled, leaping up; quick to feel the slight, blatant to resent it.

“Tyuts man!” Tam Wylie rebuked him in a careless scorn.

With a parting scowl he went swaggering up the street.

“Aye!” said Toddle drily, “that’s the Gourlay possibility.”