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THE bodies watched Gourlay in silence until he was cut 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

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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

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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 gaired him. In a' the countryside driving like his that day was never kenned or heard tell o'; they were back within the hour!

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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,

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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.