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“AYE man, Templandmuir, it’s you!” said Gourlay, coming forward with great heartiness, “Aye man, and how are ye? C’way into the parlour!”

“Good evening, Mr. Gourlay,” said the Templar. His manner was curiously subdued.

Since his marriage there was a great change in the rubicund squireen. Hitherto he had lived in sluttish comfort on his own land, content with the little it brought in, and proud to be the friend of Gourlay whom everybody feared. If it ever dawned on his befuddled mind that Gourlay turned the friendship to his own account, his vanity was flattered by the prestige he acquired because of it. Like many another robustious big toper, the Templar was a chicken at heart, and “to be in with Gourlay” lent him a consequence that covered his deficiency. “Yes, I’m sleepy,” he would yawn in Skeighan Mart, “I had a sederunt yestreen wi’ John Gourlay,” and he would slap his boot with his riding-switch, and feel like a hero. “I know how it is, I know how it is!” Provost Connal of Barbie used to cry; “Gourlay both courts and coves him—first he courts and then he coves—and the Templar hasn’t the courage to break it off!” The Provost hit the mark.

But when the Templar married the miller’s daughter of the Mill o’ Blink (a sad come-down, said foolish neighbours, for a Halliday of Templandmuir) there was

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a sudden change about the laird. In our good Scots proverb, "A miller's daughter has a shrill voice" and the new leddy of Templandmuir ("a leddy she is!" said the frightened housekeeper) justified the proverb. Her voice went with the skirl of an East wind through the rat-riddled mansion of the Hallidays. She was nine-and-twenty, and a birkie woman of nine-and-twenty can make a good husband out of very unpromising material. The Templar wore a scared look in those days and went home betimes. His cronies knew the fun was over when they heard what happened to the great punch-bowl—she made it a swine-trough. It was the heirloom of a hundred years, and as much as a man could carry with his arms out, a massive curio in stone; but to her husband's plaint about its degradation, "Oh," she cried, "it'll never know the difference! It's been used to swine!"

But she was not content with the cessation of the old, she was determined on bringing in the new. For a twelvemonth now she had urged her husband to be rid of Gourlay. The country was opening up, she said, and the quarry ought to be their own. A dozen times he had promised her to warn Gourlay that he must yield the quarry when his tack ran out at the end of the year, and a dozen times he had shrunk from the encounter.

"I'll write," he said feebly.

"Write!" said she, lowered in her pride to think her husband was a coward. "Write, indeed! Man, have ye no spunk? Think what he has made out o' ye! Think o' the money that has gone to him that should have come to you! You should be glad o' the chance to tell him o't. My certy, if I was you I wouldn't miss

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it for the world—just to let him know of his cheatry! Oh, it's very right that *I*”—she sounded the *I* big and brave—“it's very right that *I* should live in this tumbledown hole while *he* builds a palace from your plunder! It's right that *I* should put up with this”—she flung hands of contempt at her dwelling—“it's right that *I* should put up with this, while yon trollop has a splendid mansion on the top o' the brae! And every bawbee of his fortune has come out of you—the fool makes nothing from his other business—he would have been a pauper if he hadn't met a softie like you that he could do what he liked with. Write, indeed! I have no patience with a wheen sumphs of men! Them do the work o' the world! They may wear the breeks, but the women wear the brains, I trow. I'll have it out with the black brute myself,” screamed the hardy dame, “if you're feared of his glower. If you havena the pluck for it, *I* have. Write, indeed! In you go to the meeting that oald ass of a Provost has convened, and don't show your face in Templandmuir till you have had it out with Gourlay!”

No wonder the Templar looked subdued.

When Gourlay came forward with his usual calculated heartiness, the laird remembered his wife and felt very uncomfortable. It was ill to round on a man who always imposed on him a hearty and hardy good-fellowship. Gourlay, greeting him so warmly, gave him no excuse for an outburst. In his dilemma he turned to the children, to postpone the evil hour.

“Aye, man, John!” he said, heavily, “you're there!” Heavy Scotsmen are fond of telling folk that they are where they are. “You're there!” said Templandmuir.

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"Aye," said John, the simpleton, "I'm here."

In the grime of the boy's face there were large white circles round the eyes, showing where his fists had rubbed off the tears through the day.

"How are you doing at the school?" said the Templar.

"Oh, he's an ass!" said Gourlay. "He takes after his mother in that! The lassie's more smart—she favours our side o' the house! Eh, Jenny?" he enquired, and tugged her pigtail, smiling down at her in grim fondness.

"Yes," nodded Janet, encouraged by the petting, "John's always at the bottom of the class. Jimmy Wilson's always at the top, and the dominie set him to teach John his 'counts the day—after he had thrashed him!"

She cried out, at a sudden tug on her pigtail, and looked up, with tears in her eyes, to meet her father's scowl.

"You eediot!" said Gourlay, gazing at his son with a savage contempt, "have you no pride to let Wilson's son be your master?"

John slunk from the room.

"Bide where you are, Templandmuir," said Gourlay, after a little, "I'll be back directly."

He went through to the kitchen and took a crystal jug from the dresser. He "made a point" of bringing the water for his whiskey. "I like to pump it up *cold*," he used to say, "cold and cold, ye know, till there's a mist on the outside of the glass like the bloom on a plum, and then, by Goad, ye have the fine drinking! Oh, no—ye needn't tell me, I wouldn't lip drink if the

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water wasna ice-cold." He never varied from the tipple he approved. In his long sederunts with Templandmuir he would slip out to the pump, before every brew, to get water of sufficient coldness.

To-night he would birl the bottle with Templandmuir as usual, till the fuddled laird should think himself a fine big fellow as being the intimate of John Gourlay—and then, sober as a judge himself, he would drive him home in the small hours. And when next they met, the pot-valiant squireen would chuckle proudly, "Faith, yon was a night." By a erude cunning of the kind Gourlay had maintained his ascendancy for years, and to-night he would maintain it still. He went out to the pump, to fetch water with his own hands, for their first libation.

But when he came back and set out the big decanter Templandmuir started to his feet.

"Noat to-night, Mr. Gourlay," he stammered—and his unusual flutter of refusal might have warned Gourlay—"noat to-night, if *you* please, noat to-night, if *you* please. As a matter of fact—eh—what I really came into the town for, doan't you see, was—eh—to attend the meeting the Provost has convened about the railway. You'll come down to the meeting, will ye noat?"

He wanted to get Gourlay away from the House with the Green Shutters. It would be easier to quarrel with him out of doors.

But Gourlay gaped at him across the table, his eyes big with surprise and disapproval.

"Huh!" he growled, "I wonder at a man like you giving your head to that! It's a when damned nonsense."

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“ Oh, I’m no so sure of that,” drawled the Templar. “ I think the railway means to come.”

The whole country was agog about the new railway. The question agitating solemn minds was whether it should join the main line at Fechars, thirty miles ahead, or pass to the right, through Fleckie and Barbie, to a junction up at Skeighan Drone. Many were the reasons spluttered in vehement debate for one route or the other. “ On the one side, ye see, Skeighan was a big place a’readys, and look what a centre it would be, if it had three lines of rail running out and in! Eh, my, what a centre! Then there was Fleckie and Barbie—they would be the big towns! Up the valley, too, was the shortest road; it would be a daft-like thing to build thirty mile of rail, when fifteen was enough to establish the connection! And was it likely—I put it to ainy man of sense—was it likely the Coal Company wouldn’t do everything in their power to get the railway up the valley, seeing that if it didn’t come that airt, they would need to build a line of their own?”—“ Ah, but then, ye see, Fechars was a big place, too, and there was lots of mineral up there as well! And though it was a longer road to Fechars and part of it lay across the moors, there were several wee towns that airt just waiting for a chance of growth! I can tell ye, sirs, this was going to be a close question!”

Such was the talk in pot-house and parlour, at kirk and mart and tryst and fair, and wherever potentates did gather and abound. The partisans on either side began to canvass the country in support of their contentions. They might have kept their breath to cool their porridge, for these matters, we know, are settled

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in the great Witenagemot. But petitions were prepared and meetings were convened. In those days Provost Connal of Barbie was in constant communion with the "Pow-ers." "Yass," he nodded gravely—only "nod" is a word too swift for the grave inclining of that mighty pow—"Yass, ye know, the great thing in matters like this is to get at the Pow-ers, doan't you see? Oh, yass, yass; we must get at the Pow-ers!"—and he looked as if none but he were equal to the job. He even went to London (to interrogate the "Pow-ers"), and simple bodies, gathered at the Cross for their Saturday at e'en, told each other with bated breath that the Provost was away to the "seat of Goaver'ment to see about the railway." When he came back and shook his head, hope drained from his fellows and left them hollow in an empty world. But when he smacked his lips on receiving an important letter, the heavens were brightened and the landscapes smiled.

The Provost walked about the town nowadays with the air of a man on whose shoulders the weight of empires did depend. But for all his airs it was not the Head o' the Town who was the ablest advocate of the route up the Water of Barbie. It was that public-spirited citizen, Mr. James Wilson of the Cross! Wilson championed the cause of Barbie with an ardour that did infinite credit to his civic heart. For one thing, it was a grand way of recommending himself to his new townsmen, as he told his wife, "and so increasing the circle of our present trade, don't ye understand?"—for another, he was as keen as the keenest that the railway should come and enhance the value of his property. "We must agitate," he cried, when Sandy Toddle mur-

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mured a doubt whether anything they could do would be of much avail. "It's not settled yet what road the line's to follow, and who knows but a trifle may turn the scale in our behalf? Local opinion ought to be expressed! They're sending a monster petition from the Fechars side; we'll send the Company a bigger one from ours! Look at Skeighan and Fleckie and Barbie—three towns at our back, and the new Coal Company, forbye! A public opinion of that size ought to have a great weight—if put forward properly! We must agitate, sirs, we must agitate—we maun scour the country for names in our support. Look what a number of things there are, to recommend *our* route. It's the shortest, and there's no need for heavy cuttings such as are needed on the other side; the road's there a'ready—Barbie Water has cut it through the hills. It's the manifest design of Providence that there should be a line up Barbie Valley! What a position for't!—And, oh," thought Wilson, "what a site for building houses in my holm!—Let a meeting be convened at wunst!"

The meeting was convened with Provost Connal in the chair, and Wilson as general factotum.

"You'll come down to the meeting?" said Templandmuir to Gourlay.

Go to a meeting for which Wilson had sent out the bills! At another, Gourlay would have hurled his usual objurgation that he would see him condemned to eternal agonies ere he granted his request! But Templandmuir was different. Gourlay had always flattered this man (whom he inwardly despised) by a companionship which made proud the other. He had always yielded to Templandmuir in small things, for the sake

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of the quarry, which was a great thing. He yielded to him now.

“Verra well,” he said shortly, and rose to get his hat.

When Gourlay put on his hat, the shallow meanness of his brow was hid, and nothing was seen to impair his dark strong gravity of face. He was a man you would have turned to look at, as he marched in silence by the side of Templandmuir. Though taller than the laird, he looked shorter because of his enormous breadth. He had a chest like the heave of a hill. Templandmuir was afraid of him. And fretting at the necessity he felt to quarrel with a man of whom he was afraid, he had an unreasonable hatred of Gourlay whose conduct made this quarrel necessary at the same time that his character made it to be feared; and he brooded on his growing rage that, with it for a stimulus, he might work his cowardly nature to the point of quarrelling. Conscious of the coming row, then, he felt awkward in the present, and was ignorant what to say. Gourlay was silent, too. He felt it an insult to the House with the Green Shutters that the laird should refuse its proffered hospitality. He hated to be dragged to a meeting he despised. Never before was such irritation between them.

When they came to the hall, where the meeting was convened, there were knots of bodies grouped about the floor. Wilson fluttered from group to group, an important man, with a roll of papers in his hand. Gourlay, quick for once in his dislike, took in every feature of the man he loathed.

Wilson was what the sentimental women of the neighbourhood called a “bonny man.” His features were

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remarkably regular, and his complexion was remarkably fair. His brow was so delicate of hue that the blue veins running down his temples could be traced distinctly beneath the whiteness of the skin. Unluckily for him he was so fair, that in a strong light (as now beneath the gas) the suspicion of his unwashedness became a certainty—"as if he got a bit idle slaik now and than, and never a good rub," thought Gourlay in a clean disgust. Full lips showed themselves bright red in the middle between the two wings of a very blonde and very symmetrical moustache. The ugly feature of the face was the blue calculating eyes. They were tender round the lids, so that the white lashes stuck out in little peaks. And in conversation he had a habit of peering out of these eyes as if he were constantly spying for something to emerge that he might twist to his advantage. As he talked to a man close by, and glimmered (not at the man beside him, but far away in the distance of his mind at some chance of gain suggested by the other's words) Gourlay heard him say musingly, "Imphm; imphm; imphm; there might be something *in* that!" nodding his head and stroking his moustache, as he uttered each meditative "imphm."

It was Wilson's unconscious revelation that his mind was busy with a commercial hint which he had stolen from his neighbour's talk. "The damned sneek-drawer!" thought Gourlay, enlightened by his hate, "he's sucking Tam Finlay's brains, to steal some idea for himsell!" And still as Wilson listened he murmured swiftly, "Imphm! I see, Mr. Finlay; imphm! imphm! imphm!" nodding his head and pulling his moustache and glimmering at his new "opportunity."

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Our insight is often deepest into those we hate, because annoyance fixes our thought on them to probe. We cannot keep our minds off them—"Why do they do it?" we snarl, and wondering why, we find out their character. Gourlay was not an observant man, but every man is in any man somewhere, and hate to-night driving his mind into Wilson, helped him to read him like an open book. He recognized with a vague uneasiness—not with fear, for Gourlay did not know what it meant, but with uneasy anger—the superior cunning of his rival. Gourlay, a strong block of a man cut off from the world by impotence of speech, could never have got out of Finlay what Wilson drew from him in two minutes' easy conversation.

Wilson ignored Gourlay, but he was very blithe with Templandmuir and inveigled him off to a corner. They talked together very briskly, and Wilson laughed once with uplifted head, glancing across at Gourlay as he laughed. Curse them, were they speaking of him?

The hall was crammed at last, and the important bodies took their seats upon the front benches. Gourlay refused to be seated with the rest, but stood near the platform, with his back to the wall, by the side of Templandmuir.

After what the Provost described "as a few preliminary remarks"—they lasted half an hour—he called on Mr. Wilson to address the meeting. Wilson descanted on the benefits that would accrue to Barbie if it got the railway, and on the needcessity for a "long pull and a strong pull and a pull altogether"—a phrase which he repeated many times in the course of his address. He sat down at last amid thunders of applause.

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“There’s no needcessity for me to make a loang speech,” said the Provost.

“Hear, hear!” said Gourlay, and the meeting was unkind enough to laugh.

“Order, order!” cried Wilson perkily.

“As I was saying when I was grossly interrupted,” fumed the Provost, “there’s no needcessity for me to make a loang speech. I had thoat we were a-all agreed on the desirabcelity of the rileway coming in our direction. I had thoat, after the able—I must say the very able—speech of Mr. Wilson, that there wasn’t a man in this room so shtupid as to utter a word of dishapproval. I had thoat we might prosheed at woance to elect a deputation. I had thoat we would get the name of everybody here for the great petition we mean to send the Pow-ers. I had thoat it was all, so to shpeak, a foregone conclusion. But it seems I was mistaken, ladies and gentlemen—or rather, I oat to say gentlemen, for I believe there are no ladies present. Yass, it seems I was mistaken. It may be there are some who would like to keep Barbie going on in the oald way which they found so much to their advantage. It may be there are some who regret a change that will put an end to their chances of tyraneezin’. It may be there are some who know themselves so shtupid that they fear the new condections of trade the railway’s bound to bring.”—Here Wilson rose and whispered in his ear, and the people watched them, wondering what hint J. W. was passing to the Provost. The Provost leaned with pompous gravity toward his monitor, hand at ear to catch the treasured words. He nodded and resumed.—“Now, gentlemen, as Mr. Wilson said, this is a case that needs

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a loang pull, and a stroang pull, and a pull altogether. We must be unanimous. It will *noat* do to show ourselves divided among ourselves. Therefore, I **think**, we oat to have expressions of opinion from some of our leading townsmen. That will show how far we are unanimous. I had thoat there could be only one opinion, and that we might prosheed at once with the petition. But it seems I was wroang. It is best to enquire first exactly where we stand. So I call upon Mr. John Gourlay who has been the foremost man in the town for mainy years—at least he used to be that—I call upon Mr. Gourlay as the first to express an opinion on the subjeck.”

Wilson’s hint to the Provost placed Gourlay in a fine dilemma. Stupid as he was he was not so stupid as not to perceive the general advantage of the railway. If he approved it, however, he would seem to support Wilson and the Provost whom he loathed. If he disapproved, his opposition would be set down to a selfish consideration for his own trade, and he would incur the anger of the meeting, which was all for the coming of the railway. Wilson had seized the chance to put him in a false position. He knew Gourlay could not put forty words together in public, and that in his dilemma he would blunder and give himself away.

Gourlay evaded the question.

“It would be better to convene a meeting,” he bawled to the Provost, “to consider the state of some folk’s back-doors.”—That was a nipper to Wilson!—“There’s a stink at the Cross that’s enough to kill a cuddy!”

“Evidently not,” yelled Wilson, “since you’re still alive!”

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A roar went up against Gourlay. All he could do was to scowl before him, with hard-set mouth and gleaming eyes, while they bellowed him to scorn.

"I would like to hear what Templandmuir has to say on the subject," said Wilson getting up. "But no doubt he'll follow his friend, Mr. Gourlay."

"No, I don't follow Mr. Gourlay," bawled Templandmuir with unnecessary loudness. The reason of his vehemence was twofold. He was nettled (as Wilson meant he should) by the suggestion that he was nothing but Gourlay's henchman. And, being eager to oppose Gourlay, yet a coward, he yelled to supply in noise what he lacked in resolution.

"I don't follow Mr. Gourlay at all," he roared. "I follow nobody but myself! Every man in the district's in support of this petition. It would be absurd to suppose anything else. I'll be glad to sign't among the first, and do everything I can in its support."

"Verra well," said the Provost, "it seems we're agreed after all. We'll get some of our foremost men to sign the petition at this end of the hall, and then it'll be placed in the anteroom for the rest to sign as they go out."

"Take it across to Gourlay," whispered Wilson to the two men who were carrying the enormous tome. They took it over to the grain-merchant, and one of them handed him an inkhorn. He dashed it to the ground.

The meeting hissed like a cellarful of snakes. But Gourlay turned and glowered at them, and somehow the hisses died away. His was the high courage that

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feeds on hate, and welcomes rather than shrinks from its expression. He was smiling as he faced them.

"Let *me* pass," he said, and shouldered his way to the door, the bystanders falling back to make room. Templandmuir followed him out.

"I'll walk to the head o' the brae," said the Templar.

He must have it out with Gourlay at once, or else go home to meet the anger of his wife. Having opposed Gourlay already, he felt that now was the time to break with him for good. Only a little was needed to complete the rupture. And he was the more impelled to declare himself to-night because he had just seen Gourlay discomfited, and was beginning to despise the man he had formerly admired. Why the whole meeting had laughed at his expense! In quarrelling with Gourlay, moreover, he would have the whole locality behind him. He would range himself on the popular side. Every impulse of mind and body pushed him forward to the brink of speech; he would never get a better occasion to bring out his grievance.

They trudged together in a burning silence. Though nothing was said between them, each was in wrathful contact with the other's mind. Gourlay blamed everything that had happened on Templandmuir, who had dragged him to the meeting and deserted him. And Templandmuir was longing to begin about the quarry, but afraid to start.

That was why he began at last with false unnecessary loudness. It was partly to encourage himself (as a bull bellows to increase his rage) and partly because his spite had been so long controlled. It burst the louder for its pent fury.

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“Mr. Gourlay!” he bawled suddenly, when they came opposite the House with the Green Shutters, “I’ve had a crow to pick with you for more than a year!”

It came on Gourlay with a flash that Templandmuir was slipping away from him. But he must answer him civilly for the sake of the quarry.

“Aye man,” he said quietly, “and what may that be?”

“I’ll damned soon tell you what it is,” said the Templar. “Yon was a monstrous overcharge for bringing my ironwork from Fleckie. I’ll be damned if I put up with that!”

And yet it was only a trifle. He had put up with fifty worse impositions and never said a word. But when a man is bent on a quarrel any spark will do for an explosion.

“How do ye make that out?” said Gourlay, still very quietly, lest he should alienate the quarry laird.

“Damned fine do I make that out,” yelled Templandmuir, and louder than ever was the yell. He was the brave man now, with his bellow to hearten him. “Damned fine do I make that out. You charged me for a whole day, though half o’t was spent upon your own concerns. I’m tired o’ you and your cheatry. You’ve made a braw penny out o’ me in your time. But curse me if I endure it loanger. I give you notice this verra night that your tack o’ the quarry must end at Martinmas.”

He was off, glad to have it out and glad to escape the consequence, leaving Gourlay a cauldron of wrath in the darkness. It was not merely the material loss that maddened him. But for the first time in his life he had

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taken a rebuff without a word or a blow in return. In his desire to conciliate he had let Templandmuir get away unscathed. His blood rocked him where he stood.

He walked blindly to the kitchen door—never knowing how he reached it. It was locked—at this early hour!—and the simple inconvenience let loose the fury of his wrath. He struck the door with his clenched fist till the blood streamed on his knuckles.

It was Mrs. Gourlay who opened the door to him. She started back before his awful eyes.

“John!” she cried, “what’s wrong wi’ ye?”

The sight of the she-tatterdemalion there before him, whom he had endured so long and must endure forever, was the crowning burden of his night. Damn her, why didn’t she get out of the way, why did she stand there in her dirt and ask silly questions? He struck her on the bosom with his great fist, and sent her spinning on the dirty table.

She rose from among the broken dishes, and came towards him, with slack lips and great startled eyes. “John,” she panted, like a pitiful frightened child, “what have I been doing? Man, what did you hit me for?”

He gaped at her with hanging jaw. He knew he was a brute—knew she had done nothing to-night more than she had ever done, knew he had vented on her a wrath that should have burst on others. But his mind was at a stick; how could he explain—to *her*? He gaped and glowered for a speechless moment, then turned on his heel and went into the parlour, slamming the door till the windows rattled in their frames.

She stared after him a while in large-eyed stupor,

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then flung herself in her old nursing chair by the fire, and spat blood in the ribs, hawking it up coarsely—we forget to be delicate in moments of suppremer agony. And then she flung her apron over her head and rocked herself to and fro in the chair where she had nursed his children, wailing: “It’s a pity o’ me, it’s a pity o’ me! My God, aye, it’s a geyan pity o’ me!”

The boy was in bed, but Janet had watched the scene with a white scared face and tearful cries. She crept to her mother’s side.

The sympathy of children with those who weep is innocently selfish. The sight of tears makes them uncomfortable, and they want them to cease, in the interests of their own happiness. If the outward signs of grief would only vanish, all would be well. They are not old enough to appreciate the inward agony.

So Janet tugged at the obscuring apron, and whimpered, “Don’t greet, mother, don’t greet. Woman, I dinna like to see ye greetin’.”

But Mrs. Gourlay still rocked herself and wailed, “It’s a pity o’ me, it’s a pity o’ me; my God, aye, it’s a geyan pity o’ me.”