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THAT dinner was a turning-point in young Gourlay's career. It is lucky that a letter describing it has fallen into the hands of the patient chronicler. It was sent by young Jimmy Wilson to his mother. As it gives an idea—which is slightly mistaken—of Jock Allan, and an idea—which is very unmistakable—of young Wilson, it is here presented in the place of pride. It were a pity not to give a human document of this kind all the honour in one's power.

“Dear mother,” said the wee sma' Scootchman—so the hearty Allan dubbed him—“Dear mother, I just write to inform you that I've been out to a grand dinner at Jock Allan's. He met me on Prince's Street, and made a great how-d'ye-do. ‘Come out on Thursday night, and dine with me,’ says he, in his big way. So here I went out to see him. I can tell you he's a warmer! I never saw a man eat so much in all my born days—but I suppose he would be having more on his table than usual, to shew off a bit, knowing us Barbie boys would be writing home about it all. And drink! D'ye know?—he began with a whole half tumbler of whiskey, and how many more he had I really should *not* like to say! And he must be used to it, too, for it seemed to have no effect on him whatever. And then he smoked and smoked—two great big cigars after we had finished eating, and then ‘damn it’ says he—he's

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an awful man to swear—‘damn it’ he says, ‘there’s no satisfaction in cigars; I must have a pipe,’ and he actually smoked *four* pipes before I came away! I noticed the cigars were called ‘Estorellas—Best Quality,’ and when I was in last Saturday night getting an ounce of shag at the wee shoppie round the corner, I asked the price of ‘these Estorellas.’ ‘Ninepence a piece!’ said the bodie. Just imagine Jock Allan smoking eighteenpence—and not being satisfied! He’s up in the world since he used to shaw turnips at Loranogie for sixpence a day! But he’ll come down as quick if he keeps on at yon rate. He made a great phrase with me, but though it keeps down one’s weekly bill to get a meal like yon—I declare I wasn’t hungry for two days—for all that I’ll go very little about him. He’ll be the kind that borrows money very fast—one of those harun-scarum ones!”

Criticism like that is a boomerang that comes back to hit the emitting skull with a hint of its kindred woodenness. It reveals the writer more than the written of. Allan was a bigger man than you would gather from Wilson’s account of his Gargantuan revelry. He had a genius for mathematics—a gift which crops up, like music, in the most unexpected corners—and from ploughboy and herd he had become an actuary in Auld Reekie. Wilson had no need to be afraid, the meagre fool, for his host could have bought him and sold him.

Allan had been in love with young Gourlay’s mother when she herself was a gay young fliskie at Tenshill-land, but his little romance was soon ended when Gourlay came and whisked her away. But she remained the one romance of his life. Now in his gross and jovial

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middle-age he idealized her in memory (a sentimentalist, of course—he was Scotch); he never saw her in her scraggy misery to be disillusioned; to him she was still the wee bit lairdie's dochter, a vision that had dawned on his wretched boyhood, a pleasant and pathetic memory. And for that reason he had a curious kindness to her boy. That was why he introduced him to his boon companions. He thought he was doing him a good turn.

It was true that Allan made a phrase with a withered wisp of humanity like young Wilson. Not that he failed to see through him, for he christened him "a dried washing-clout." But Allan, like most great-hearted Scots far from their native place, saw it through a veil of sentiment; harsher features that would have been ever-present to his mind if he had never left it, disappeared from view, and left only the finer qualities bright within his memory. And idealizing the place he idealized its sons. To him they had a value not their own, just because they knew the brig and the burn and the brae, and had sat upon the school benches. He would have welcomed a dog from Barbie. It was from a like generous emotion that he greeted the bodies so warmly on his visits home—he thought they were as pleased to see him, as he was to see them. But they imputed false motives to his hearty greetings. Even as they shook his hand the mean ones would think to themselves: "What does he mean by this, now? What's he up till? No doubt he'll be wanting something off me!" They could not understand the gusto with which the returned exile cried "Aye man, Jock Tamson, and how are ye?" They thought such warmth must have a sinister inten-

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tion.—A Scot revisiting his native place ought to walk very quietly. For the parish is sizing him up.

There were two things to be said against Allan, and two only—unless, of course, you consider drink an objection. Wit with him was less the moment's glittering flash than the anecdotal bang; it was a fine old crusted blend which he stored in the cellars of his mind to bring forth on suitable occasions, as cob-webby as his wine. And it tickled his vanity to have a crowd of admiring youngsters round him to whom he might retail his anecdotes, and play the brilliant *raconteur*. He had cronies of his own years and he was lordly and jovial amongst them—yet he wanted another entourage. He was one of those middle-aged bachelors who like a train of youngsters behind them, whom they favour in return for homage. The wealthy man who had been a peasant lad delighted to act the jovial host to sons of petty magnates from his home. Batch after batch as they came up to College were drawn around him—partly because their homage pleased him and partly because he loved anything whatever that came out of Barbie. There was no harm in Allan—though when his face was in repose you saw the look in his eye at times of a man defrauding his soul. A robustious young fellow of sense and brains would have found in this lover of books and a bottle not a bad comrade. But he was the worst of cronies for a weak swaggerer like Gourlay. For Gourlay, admiring the older man's jovial power, was led on to imitate his faults, to think them virtues and a credit—and he lacked the clear cool head that kept Allan's faults from flying away with him.

At dinner that night there were several braw braw lads

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of Barbie Water. There was Tarmillan the doctor (a son of Irrendavie), Logan the cashier, Tozer the Englishman, old Partan—a guileless and enquiring mind—and half-a-dozen students raw from the West. The students were of the kind that goes up to College with the hay-seed sticking in its hair. Two are in a Colonial Cabinet now, two are in the poor-house. So they go.

Tarmillan was the last to arrive. He came in sucking his thumb into which he had driven a splinter while conducting an experiment.

“I’ve a morbid horror of lockjaw,” he explained. “I never get a jag from a pin but I see myself in the shape of a hoop, semicircular, with my head on one end of a table my heels on the other, and a doctor standing on my navel trying to reduce the curvature.”

“Gosh!” said Partan, who was a literal fool, “is that the treatment they purshoo?”

“That’s the treatment!” said Tarmillan, sizing up his man. “Oh, it’s a queer thing, lockjaw! I remember when I was gold-mining in Tibet, one of our carriers who died of lockjaw had such a circumbendibus in his body, that we froze him and made him the hoop of a bucket to carry our water in. You see he was a thin bit man, and iron was scarce.”

“Aye man!” cried Partan, “you’ve been in Tibet?”

“Often,” waved Tarmillan, “often! I used to go there every summer.”

Partan, who liked to extend his geographical knowledge, would have talked of Tibet for the rest of the evening—and Tarmie would have told him news—but Allan broke in.

“How’s the book, Tarmillan?” he enquired.

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Tarmillan was engaged on a treatise which those who are competent to judge consider the best thing of its kind ever written.

“Oh, don’t ask me,” he writhed. “Man, it’s an irksome thing to write, and to be asked about it makes you squirm. It’s almost as offensive to ask a man when his book will be out, as to ask a woman when she’ll be delivered. I’m glad you invited me—to get away from the confounded thing. It’s become a blasted tyrant. A big work’s a mistake; it’s a monster that devours the brain. I neglect my other work for that fellow of mine; he bags everything I think. I never light on a new thing, but ‘Hullo!’ I cry, ‘here’s an idea for the book!’ If you are engaged on a big subject all your thinking works into it or out of it.”

“M’ yes,” said Logan, “but that’s a swashing way of putting it.”

“It’s the danger of the aphorism,” said Allan, “that it states too much in trying to be small. Tozer, what do you think?”

“I never was engaged on a big subject,” sniffed Tozer.

“We’re aware o’ that!” said Tarmillan.

Tozer went under, and Tarmillan had the table. Allan was proud of him.

“Courage is the great thing,” said he. “It often succeeds by the mere show of it. It’s the timid man that a dog bites. Run *at* him and he runs.”

He was speaking to himself rather than the table, admiring the courage that had snubbed Tozer with a word. But his musing remark rang a bell in young Gourlay. By Jove he had thought that himself, so he had! He was a hollow thing, he knew, but a buckram

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pretence prevented the world from piercing to his hollowness. The son of his courageous sire (whom he equally admired and feared) had learned to play the game of bluff. A bold front was half the battle. He had worked out his little theory, and it was with a shock of pleasure the timid youngster heard great Allan give it forth. He burned to let him know that he had thought that, too.

To the youngsters, fat of face and fluffy of its circling down, the talk was a banquet of the gods. For the first time in their lives they heard ideas (such as they were) flung round them royally. They yearned to show that they were thinkers, too. And Gourlay was fired with the rest.

“I heard a very good one the other day from old Bauldy Johnston,” said Allan, opening his usual wallet of stories when the dinner was in full swing.—At a certain stage of the evening “I heard a good one” was the invariable keynote of his talk. If you displayed no wish to hear the “good one” he was huffed.—“Bauldy was up in Edinburgh,” he went on, “and I met him near the Scott Monument and took him to Lockhart’s for a dram. You remember what a friend he used to be of old Will Overton. I wasn’t aware, by the bye, that Will was dead till Bauldy told me. ‘*He was a great fellow my friend Will,*’ he rang out in yon deep voice of his. ‘*The thumb mark of his Maker was wet in the clay of him.*’ Man, it made a quiver go down my spine.”

“Oh, Bauldy has been a kenneled phrase-maker for the last forty year,” said Tarmillan. “But every other Scots peasant has the gift. To hear Englishmen talk,

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you would think Carlyle was unique for the word that sends the picture home—they give the man the credit of his race. But I've heard fifty things better than 'willow man,' in the stable a-hame on a wat day in hairst—fifty things better!—from men just sitting on the corn-kists and chowing beans."

"I know a better one than that," said Allan. Tarmillan had told no story, you observe, but Allan was so accustomed to saying "I know a better one than that," that it escaped him before he was aware. "I remember when Bauldy went off to Paris on the spree. He kept his mouth shut when he came back, for he was rather ashamed o' the outburst. But the bodies were keen to hear. 'What's the incense like in Nôtre Dame?' said Johnny Coe with his e'en big. '*Burning stink!*' said Bauldy."

"I can cap that with a better one, still," said Tarmillan, who wasn't to be done by any man. "I was with Bauldy when he quarrelled Tam Gibb of Hoochan-doe. Hoochan-doe's a yelling ass, and he threatened Bauldy—oh, he would do this, and he would do that, and he would do the other thing. '*Damn ye, would ye threaten me?*' cried Bauldy. '*I'll gar your brains jaup red to the heavens!*' And, I 'clare to God, sirs, a nervous man looked up to see if the clouds werena spattered with the gore!"

Tozer cleared a sarcastic windpipe.

"Why do you clear your throat like that?" said Tarmillan—"like a crow with the croup, on a bare branch, against a grey sky in November! If I had a throat like yours, I'd cut it and be done wi't."

"I wonder what's the cause of that extraordinary

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vividness in the speech of the Scotch peasantry?" said Allan—more to keep the blades from bickering than from any wish to know.

"It comes from a power of seeing things vividly inside your mind," said a voice, timorous and wheezy, away down the table.

What cockerel was this crowing?

They turned and beheld the blushing Gourlay.

But Tarmillan and Tozer were at it again, and he was snubbed. Jimmy Wilson sniggered, and the other youngsters enjoyed his discomfiture. Huh! What right has *he* to set up his pipe?

His shirt stuck to his back. He would have liked the ground to open and swallow him.

He gulped a huge swill of whiskey to cover his vexation—and, oh, the mighty difference! A sudden courage flooded his veins. He turned with a scowl on Wilson, and, "What the devil are *you* sniggering at?" he growled. Logan, the only senior who marked the by-play, thought him a hardy young punkie.

The moment the whiskey had warmed the cockles of his heart, Gourlay ceased to care a rap for the sniggerers. Drink deadened his nervous perception of the critics on his right and left, and set him free to follow his idea undisturbed. It was an idea he had long cherished—being one of the few that ever occurred to him. He rarely made phrases himself—though, curiously enough, his father often did without knowing it—the harsh grind of his character producing a flash. But Gourlay was aware of his uncanny gift of visualization—or of "seeing things in the inside of his head," as he called it—and vanity prompted the inference, that this was the

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faculty that sprang the metaphor. His theory was now clear and eloquent before him. He was realizing for the first time in his life (with a sudden joy in the discovery) the effect of whiskey to unloose the brain; sentences went hurling through his brain with a fluency that thrilled. If he had the ear of the company, now he had the drink to hearten him, he would show Wilson and the rest that he wasn't such a blasted fool! In a room by himself he would have spouted to the empty air.

Some such point he had reached in the hurrying jumble of his thoughts, when Allan addressed him.

Allan did not mean his guest to be snubbed. He was a gentleman at heart, not a cad like Tozer; and this boy was the son of a girl whose laugh he remembered in the gloamings at Tenshillingland.

"I beg your pardon, John," he said in heavy benevolence—he had reached that stage—"I beg your pardon. I'm afraid you was interrupted."

Gourlay felt his heart a lump in his throat, but he rushed into speech.

"Metaphor comes from the power of seeing things in the inside of your head," said the unconscious disciple of Aristotle—"seeing them so vivid that you see the likeness between them. When Bauldy Johnston said 'the thumb-mark of his Maker was wet in the clay of him,' he *saw* the print of a thumb in wet clay, and he *saw* the Almighty making a man out of mud, the way He used to do in the Garden of Eden langsyne—so Bauldy flashed the two ideas together and the metaphor sprang! A man'll never make phrases unless he can see things in the middle of his brain. *I can see things in the middle of my brain,*" he went on cockily—"anything I want

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to! I don't need to shut my eyes, either. They just come up before me."

"Man, you're young to have noticed these things, John," said Jock Allan. "I never reasoned it out before, but I'm sure you're in the right o't."

He spoke more warmly than he felt, because Gourlay had flushed and panted and stammered (in spite of inspiring bold John Barleycorn) while airing his little theory, and Allan wanted to cover him. But Gourlay took it as a tribute to his towering mind. Oh, but he was the proud mannikin. "Pass the watter!" he said to Jimmy Wilson, and Jimmy passed it meekly.

Logan took a fancy to Gourlay on the spot. He was a slow sly cosy man, with a sideward laugh in his eye, a humid gleam. And because his blood was so genial and so slow, he liked to make up to brisk young fellows, whose wilder outbursts might amuse him. They quickened his sluggish blood. No bad fellow, and good-natured in his heavy way, he was what the Scotch call a "slug for the drink." A "slug for the drink" is a man who soaks and never succumbs. Logan was the more dangerous a crony on that account. Remaining sober while others grew drunk, he was always ready for another dram, always ready with an oily chuckle for the sploring nonsense of his satellites. He would see them home in the small hours, taking no mean advantage over them, never scorning them because they "couldn't carry it," only laughing at their daft vagaries. And next day he would gurgle: "So-and-so was screwed last night, and, man, if you had heard his talk!" Logan had enjoyed it. He hated to drink by himself, and liked a splurging youngster with whom to go the rounds.

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He was attracted to Gourlay by the manly way he tossed his drink, and by the false fire it put into him. But he made no immediate advance. He sat smiling in creeshy benevolence, beaming on Gourlay but saying nothing. When the party was ended, however, he made up to him going through the door.

“I’m glad to have met you, Mr. Gourlay,” said he. “Won’t you come round to the Howff for a while?”

“The Howff?” said Gourlay.

“Yes,” said Logan, “haven’t ye heard o’t! It’s a snug bit house, where some of the West Country billies foregather for a nicht at e’en. Oh, nothing to speak of, ye know—just a dram and a joke to pass the time now and then!”

“Aha!” laughed Gourlay, “there’s worse than a drink, by Jove. It puts smeddum in your blood!”

Logan nipped the guard of his arm in heavy playfulness, and led him to the Howff.