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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

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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 bravoës, 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 sony 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

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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

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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 wal-lopping ahin'. I'll have the great life o't."

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

"Hoh! hoh! hoh!" yelled the others. They hailed Swipecy'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 Swipecy.

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

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

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“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 Swipecy—so called because he always swiped when batting at rounders—the father of Swipecy 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 Swipecy 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 Swipecy 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 Swipecy’s legs), “Let me up, see!”

Swipecy let him up. John came at him with whirling arms, but Swipecy 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 Swipecy, astride his back, was bellowing “Hurroo!”—Swipecy’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 Swipecy and leapt to his feet with magnificent pride. He danced round Gourlay with his fists sawing the air. “I could fight ten of him!”

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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.