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IN those days it came to pass that Wilson sent his son to the High School of Skeighan, even James, the red-haired one, with the squint in his eye. Whereupon Gourlay sent *his* son to the High School of Skeighan, too, of course, to be upsides with Wilson. If Wilson could afford to send his boy to a distant and expensive school, then, by the Lord, so could he! And it also came to pass that James, the son of James, the grocer, took many prizes. But John, the son of John, took no prizes. Whereat there were ructions in the House of Gourlay.

Gourlay's resolve to be equal to Wilson in everything he did was his main reason for sending his son to the High School of Skeighan. That he saw his business decreasing daily was a reason, too. Young Gourlay was a lad of fifteen now, undersized for his age at that time, though he soon shot up to be a swaggering youngster. He had been looking forward with delight to helping his father in the business—how grand it would be to drive about the country and see things!—and he had irked at being kept for so long under the tawse of old Bleach-the-boys. But if the business went on at this rate there would be little in it for the boy. Gourlay was not without a thought of his son's welfare when he packed him off to Skeighan. He would give him some book-lear, he said; let him make a kirk or a mill o't.

But John shrank, chicken-hearted, from the prospect.

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Was he still to drudge at books? Was he to go out among strangers whom he feared? His imagination set to work on what he heard of the High School of Skeighan and made it a bugbear. They had to do mathematics—what could *he* do wi' thae whigmaleeries? They had to recite Shakespeare in public—how could *he* stand up and spout, before a whole jing-bang o' them?

“I don't want to gang,” he whined.

“Want?” flamed his father. “What does it matter what *you* want? Go you shall.”

“I thocht I was to help in the business,” whimpered John.

“Business!” sneered his father. “A fine help *you* would be in business.”

“Aye man, Johnnie,” said his mother, maternal fondness coming out in support of her husband, “you should be glad your father can allow ye the opportunity. Eh, but it's a grand thing, a gude education! You may rise to be a minister.”

Her ambition could no further go. But Gourlay seemed to have formed a different opinion of the sacred calling. “It's a' he's fit for,” he growled.

So John was put to the High School of Skeighan, travelling backwards and forwards night and morning by the train, after the railway had been opened. And he discovered, on trying it, that the life was not so bad as he had feared. He hated his lessons, true, and avoided them whenever he was able. But his father's pride and his mother's fondness saw that he was well-dressed and with money in his pocket; and he began to grow important. Though Gourlay was no longer the only “big man” of Barbie, he was still one of the “big men,” and

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a consciousness of the fact grew upon his son. When he passed his old classmates (apprentice-grocers now and carters and ploughboys) his febrile insolence led him to swagger and assume. And it was fine to mount the train at Barbie on the fresh cool mornings, and be off past the gleaming rivers and the woods. Better still was the home-coming—to board the empty train at Skeighan when the afternoon sun came pleasant through the windows, to loll on the fat cushions, and read the novel-ettes. He learned to smoke too, and that was a source of pride. When the train was full on market days he liked to get in among the jovial farmers who encouraged his assumptions. Meanwhile Jimmy Wilson would be elsewhere in the train, busy with his lessons for the morrow—for Jimmy had to help in the Emporium of nights—his father kept him to the grindstone. Jimmy had no more real ability than young Gourlay, but infinitely more caution. He was one of the gimlet characters who, by diligence and memory, gain prizes in their schooldays—and are fools for the remainder of their lives.

The bodies of Barbie, seeing young Gourlay at his pranks, speculated over his future, as Scotch bodies do about the future of every youngster in their ken.

“I wonder what that son o’ Gourlay’s ’ull come till,” said Sandy Toddle, musing on him with the character-reading eye of the Scots peasant.

“To no good—you may be sure of that,” said ex-Provost Connal. “He’s a regular splurge! When Drunk Dan Kennedy passed him his flask in the train the other day he swigged it, just for the sake of showing off! And he’s a coward, too, for all his swagger. He

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grew ill-bred when he swallowed the drink, and Dan, to frighten him, threatened to hang him from the window by the heels! He didn't mean it, to be sure; but young Gourlay grew white at the very idea o't—he shook like a dog in a wet sack. 'Oh!' he cried, shivering, 'how the ground would go flying past your eyes; how quick the wheel opposite ye would buzz—it would blind ye by its quickness—how the grey slag would flash below ye!' Those were his very words. He seemed to see the thing as if it were happening before his eyes, and stared like a fellow in hysterics, till Dan was obliged to give him another drink! 'You would spue with the dizziness,' said he, and he actually bocked himself."

Young Gourlay seemed bent on making good the prophecy of Barbie. Though his father was spending money he could ill afford on his education, he fooled away his time. His mind developed a little, no doubt, since it was no longer dazed by brutal and repeated floggings. In some of his classes he did fairly well. But others he loathed. It was the rule at Skeighan High School to change rooms every hour, the classes tramping from one to another through a big lobby. Gourlay got a habit of stealing off at such times—it was easy to slip out—and playing truant in the bye-ways of Skeighan. He often made his way to the station, and loafed in the waiting room. He had gone there on a summer afternoon, to avoid his mathematics and read a novel, when a terrible thing befell him.

For a while he swaggered round the empty platform and smoked a cigarette. Milk-cans clanked in a shed, mournfully. Gourlay had a congenital horror of eerie

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sounds—he was his mother's son for that—and he fled to the waiting room, to avoid the hollow clang. It was a June afternoon, of brooding heat, and a band of yellow sunshine was lying on the glazed table, showing every scratch in its surface. The place oppressed him—he was sorry he had come. But he plunged into his novel and forgot the world.

He started in fear when a voice addressed him. He looked up—and here it was only the baker!—the baker smiling at him with his fine grey eyes, the baker with his reddish fringe of beard and his honest grin, which wrinkled up his face to his eyes in merry and kindly wrinkles. He had a wonderful hearty manner with a boy.

“Aye man, John; it's you, said the baker. “Dod, I'm just in time. The storm's at the burstin!”

“Storm!” said Gourlay. He had a horror of lightning since the day of his birth.

“Aye, we're in for a pelter. What have you been doing that you didna see't?”

They went to the window. The fronting heavens were a black purple. The thunder, which had been growling in the distance, swept forward and roared above the town. The crash no longer rolled afar, but cracked close to the ear, hard, crepitant. Quick lightning stabbed the world in vicious and repeated hate. A blue-black moistness lay heavy on the cowering earth. The rain came—a few drops at first, sullen, as if loth to come, that splashed on the pavement wide as a crown-piece—then a white rush of slanting spears. A great blob shot in through the window, open at the top, and spat wide on Gourlay's cheek. It was lukewarm.

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He started violently—that warmth on his cheek brought the terror so near.

The heavens were rent with a crash and the earth seemed on fire. Gourlay screamed in terror.

The baker put his arm round him in kindly protection.

“Tuts, man, dinna be feared,” he said. “You’re John Gourlay’s son, ye know. You ought to be a hardy man.”

“Aye, but I’m no,” chattered John, the truth coming out in his fear. “I just let on to be.”

But the worst was soon over. Lightning, both sheeted and forked, was vivid as ever, but the thunder slunk growling away.

“The heavens are opening and shutting like a man’s eye,” said Gourlay; “oh, it’s a terrible thing the world—” and he covered his face with his hands.

A flash shot into a mounded wood far away. “It stabbed it like a dagger!” stared Gourlay.

“Look, look, did ye see yon? It came down in a broad flash—then jerked to the side—then ran down to a sharp point again. It was like the coulter of a plough.”

Suddenly a blaze of lightning flamed wide, and a fork shot down its centre.

“That,” said Gourlay, “was like a red crack in a white-hot furnace door.”

“Man, you’re a noticing boy,” said the baker.

“Aye,” said John, smiling in curious self-interest, “I notice things too much. They give me pictures in my mind. I’m feared of them, but I like to think them over when they’re bye.”

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Boys are slow of confidence to their elders, but Gourlay's terror and the baker's kindness moved him to speak. In a vague way he wanted to explain.

"I'm no feared of folk," he went on, with a faint return to his swagger. "But things get in on me. A body seems so wee compared with that—" he nodded to the warring heavens.

The baker did not understand. "Have you seen your faither?" he asked.

"My faither!" John gasped in terror. If his father should find him playing truant!

"Yes; did ye no ken he was in Skeighan? We come up thegither by the ten train, and are meaning to gang hame by this. I expect him every moment."

John turned to escape. In the doorway stood his father.

When Gourlay was in wrath he had a widening glower that enveloped the offender—yet his eye seemed to stab—a flash shot from its centre to transfix and pierce. Gaze at a tiger through the bars of his cage, and you will see the look. It widens and concentrates at once.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, with the wild-beast glower on his son.

"I—I—I," John stammered and choked.

"What are you doing here?" said his father.

John's fingers worked before him; his eyes were large and aghast on his father; though his mouth hung open no words would come.

"How lang has he been here, baker?"

There was a curious regard between Gourlay and the baker. Gourlay spoke with a firm civility.

"Oh, just a wee whilie," said the baker.

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“ I see! You want to shield him.—You have been playing the truant, have ’ee? Am I to throw away gude money on *you* for this to be the end o’t? ”

“ Dinna be hard on him, John,” pleaded the baker. “ A boy’s but a boy. Dinna thrash him.”

“ Me thrash him! ” cried Gourlay. “ I pay the High School of Skeighan to thrash him, and I’ll take damned good care I get my money’s worth. I don’t mean to hire dowgs and bark for mysell! ”

He grabbed his son by the coat-collar and swung him out the room. Down High Street he marched, carrying his cub by the scruff of the neck as you might carry a dirty puppy to an outhouse. John was black in the face; time and again in his wrath Gourlay swung him off the ground. Grocers coming to their doors, to scatter fresh yellow sawdust on the old, now trampled black and wet on the sills, stared sideways, chins up and mouths open, after the strange spectacle. But Gourlay splashed on amid the staring crowd, never looking to the right or left.

Opposite The Fiddler’s Inn whom should they meet but Wilson! A snigger shot to his features at the sight. Gourlay swung the boy up—for a moment a wild impulse surged within him to club his rival with his own son.

He marched into the vestibule of the High School, the boy dangling from his great hand.

“ Where’s your gaffer? ” he roared at the janitor.

“ Gaffer? ” blinked the janitor.

“ Gaffer, dominie, whatever the damn you ca’ him, the fellow that runs the business.”

“ The Headmaster! ” said the janitor.

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“Heid-maister, aye!” said Gourlay in scorn, and went trampling after the janitor down a long wooden corridor. A door was flung open showing a class-room where the Headmaster was seated teaching Greek.

The sudden appearance of the great-chested figure in the door, with his fierce gleaming eyes, and the rain-beads shining on his frieze coat, brought into the close academic air the sharp strong gust of an outer world.

“I believe I pay *you* to look after that boy,” thundered Gourlay; “is this the way you do your work?” And with the word he sent his son spinning along the floor like a curling-stone, till he rattled, a wet huddled lump, against a row of chairs. John slunk bleeding behind the master.

“Really!” said MacCandlish, rising in protest.

“Don’t ‘really’ me, sir! I pay *you* to teach that boy, and you allow him to run idle in the streets! What have you to seh?”

“But what can I do?” bleated MacCandlish, with a white spread of deprecating hands. The stronger man took the grit from his limbs.

“Do? Do? Damn it, sir, am *I* to be *your* dominie? Am *I* to teach *you* your duty? Do! Flog him, flog him, flog him—if you don’t send him hame wi’ the welts on him as thick as that forefinger, I’ll have a word to say to you-ou, Misterr MacCandlish!”

He was gone—they heard him go clumping along the corridor.

Thereafter young Gourlay had to stick to his books. And, as we know, the forced union of opposites breeds the greater disgust between them. However, his school-days would soon be over, and meanwhile it was fine to

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pose on his journeys to and fro as Young Hopeful of the Green Shutters.

He was smoking at Skeighan Station on an afternoon, as the Barbie train was on the point of starting. He was staying on the platform till the last moment, in order to shew the people how nicely he could bring the smoke down his nostrils—his “Prince of Wales’s feathers” he called the great curling puffs. As he dallied, a little aback from an open window, he heard a voice which he knew mentioning the Gourlays. It was Templandmuir who was speaking.

“I see that Gourlay has lost his final appeal in that law-suit of his,” said the Templar.

“D’ye tell me that?” said a strange voice. Then—
“Gosh, he must have lost infernal!”

“Atweel has he that,” said Templandmuir. “The costs must have been enormous, and then there’s the damages. He would have been better to settle’t and be done wi’t, but his pride made him fight it to the hindmost! It has made touch the boddom of his purse, I’ll wager ye. Weel, weel, it’ll help to subdue his pride a bit, and muckle was the need o’ that.”

Young Gourlay was seized with a sudden fear. The prosperity of the House with the Green Shutters had been a fact of his existence; it had never entered his boyish mind to question its continuance. But a weakening doubt stole through his limbs. What would become of him, if the Gourlays were threatened with disaster? He had a terrifying vision of himself as a lonely atomy, adrift on a tossing world, cut off from his anchorage.

“Mother, are *we* ever likely to be ill off?” he asked his mother that evening.

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She ran her fingers through his hair, pushing it back from his brow fondly. He was as tall as herself now.

“No, no, dear; what makes ye think that? Your father has always had a grand business, and I brought a hantle money to the house.”

“Hokey!” said the youth, “when Ah’m in the business, Ah’ll have the times!”