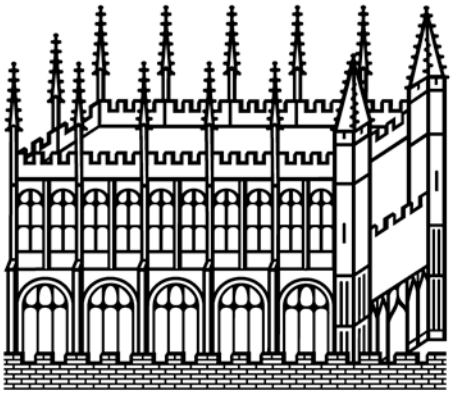

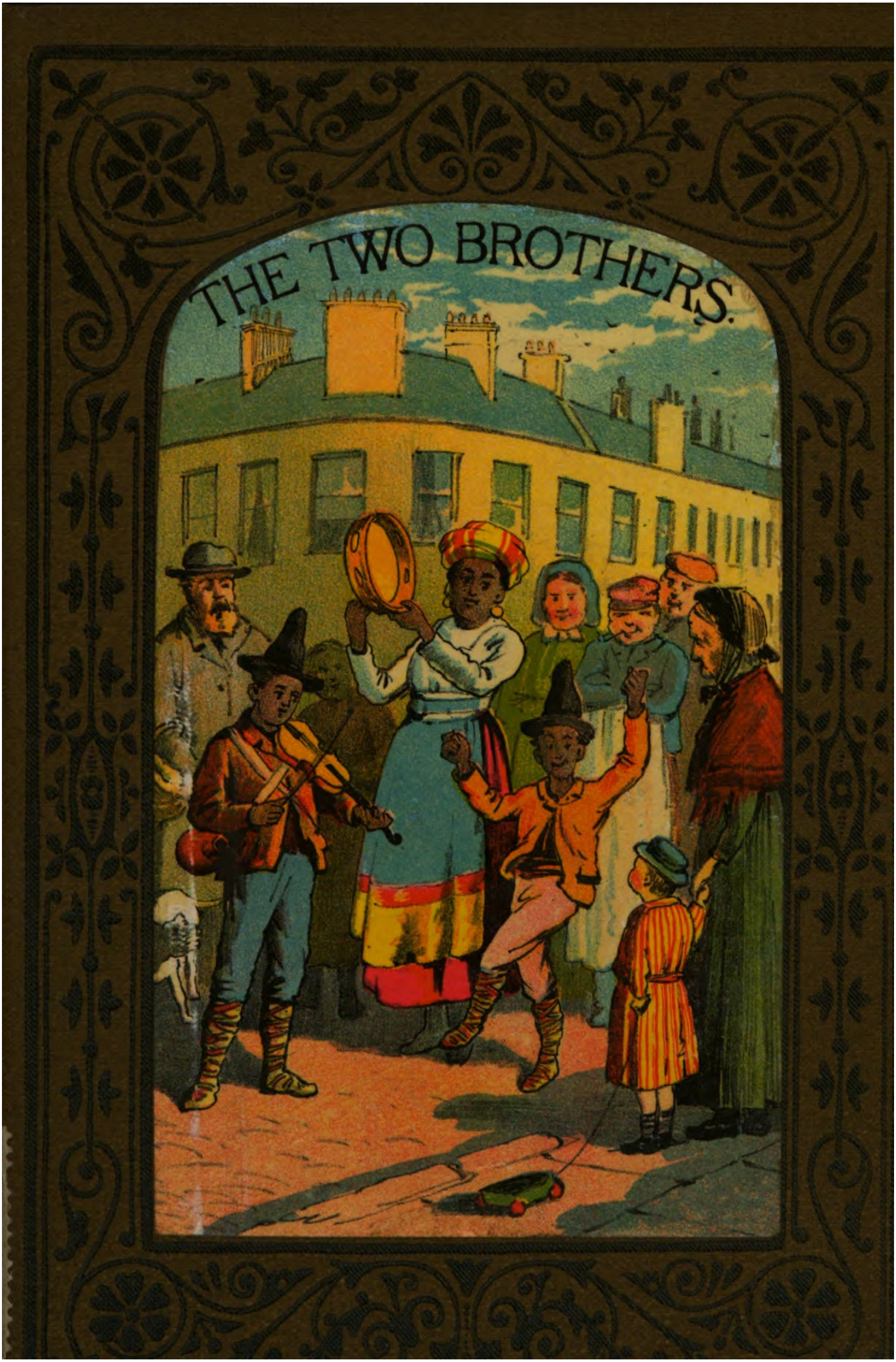
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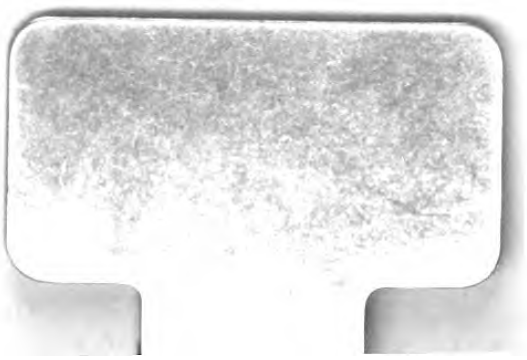

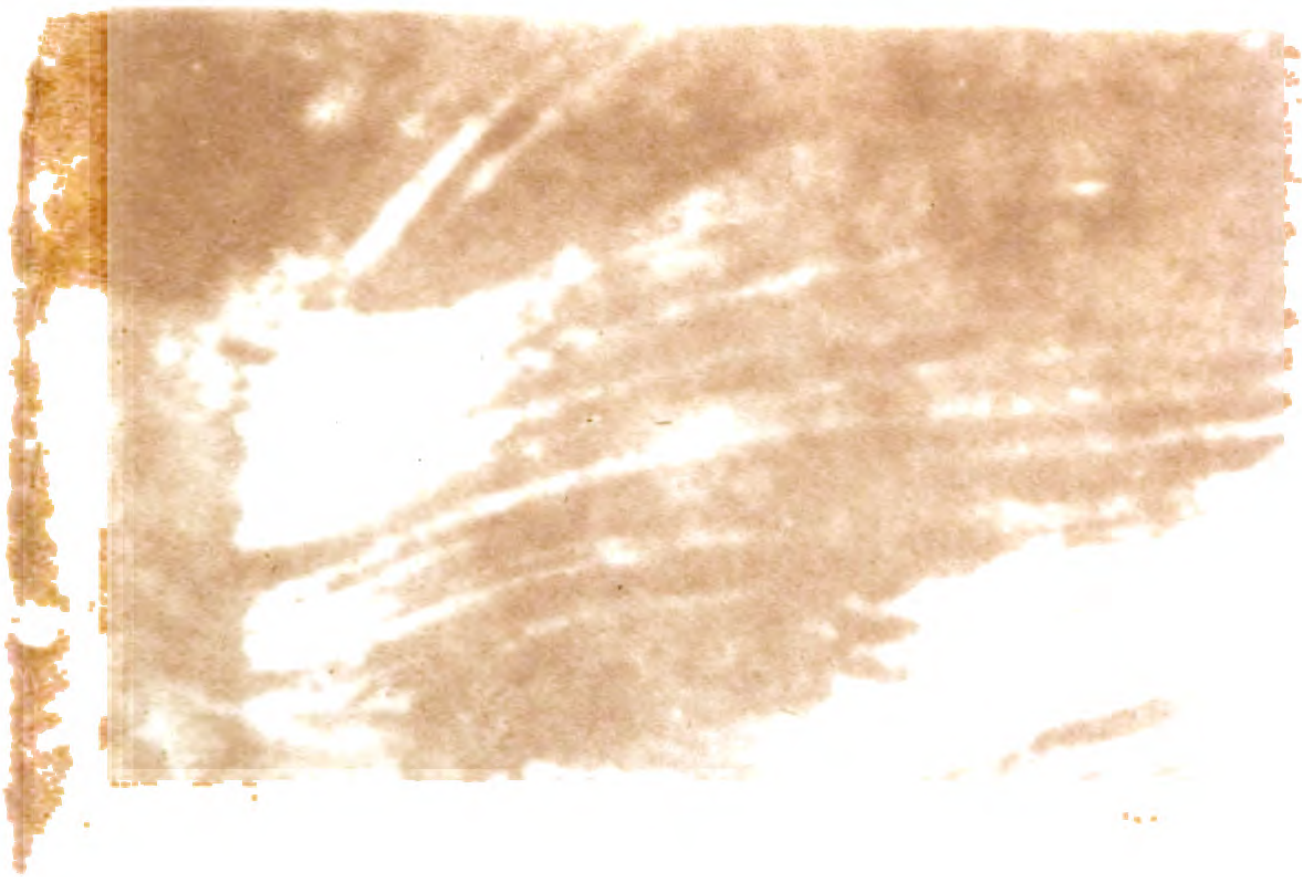

THE TWO BROTHERS.

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BY

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THE TWO BROTHERS.

PART I.

A LITTLE crowd of people was collected at the corner of Brunswick Street in Greyborough, on a chilly afternoon in March. Had you pushed through the knot of bystanders, you would have seen that the centre of attraction was three rather fantastically dressed figures—a woman and two boys.

The boys wore peaked felt hats, short jackets, and had their stockings, which were not particularly clean, cross-gartered. The woman was stout; dressed in a short, coloured petticoat and white boddice,—at least white was its original colour,—while about her head was twisted a gaudily-coloured bandana, and at her ears hung

heavy gilt earrings. The woman rattled a tambourine, which she twisted and span with not a little dexterity; one of the boys was playing a violin, and the other dancing.

The two boys presented a marked contrast. The dancer was a frail-looking little fellow, with a thin face and large dark, hollow-looking eyes. The violin player, on the contrary, was a sturdy lad, squarely set, though by no means stout. The boys were both dark-skinned, as was the woman—their mother.

The performance of these street strollers was nearly over. To say truth, they had not been very lucky this afternoon at this particular spot; the coppers gathered in had been very few; and the woman saw nothing to be gained by continuing the exhibition longer. The bigger and elder of the two boys put up his fiddle into a bag in which he carried it; the three moved away up the street, and the little crowd began to disperse.

'They Savoyard folk are getting a wee common, I doubt; the bawbees dinna seem to be comin' in ower fast. They'll hae to be finin' oot

some new dodge, I'm thinking,' said a street porter to a cabman.

It was now growing dusk. The three Savoyards pursued their way up one street and down another, until they reached one of the poorer quarters of the city—a region of many-storied houses, and narrow wynds and closes.

The younger of the two brothers walked with a very slow and languid step; he seemed utterly worn out, and every now and then his mother and brother had to stop to allow him to overtake them, on which occasions the woman addressed her son in no very gentle or encouraging tones.

It was otherwise with the elder boy, who from time to time whispered to his brother in a cheery voice, whose tones, though not very soft or smooth, were at least gentle and kindly.

At last the three turned down a close or narrow lane, and presently, descending a flight of stone steps, entered a sunk flat or rather cellar—for that was all it was.

'Bad cess to the luck,' exclaimed the woman, flinging her tambourine upon a rude truckle

bed in a corner, and proceeding to remove the handkerchief from her head. 'Sorra a happorth o' use can I see in going on with this Savoyard business any longer; it's played out, no less; an' it's some new thrick entirely we'll need to be after. Mick, ye spalpeen, be off and fetch a gill of whisky; me throat's as dhry as a kiln, and I'm dog-tired to boot.'

'Not as tired as Nat, I'll go bail, mother. He's fair like to drop, ye ken, more be token that he's not had bite or sup since mornin'. Won't I get some food o' some sort, mother, agrah?'

Mrs. O'Keefe was, as the reader will have gathered, an Irishwoman, but her children had been born and bred all their lives in Scotland. The speech of Mick and Nat O'Keefe was thus a curious hybrid dialect,—Scotch words and phrases, interspersed with Irish idioms picked up from their mother,—which was not a little funny to listen to, but which I am doubtful of being able faithfully and adequately to reproduce.

'Ask Mr. Macfie to give ye a couple av herring, and get two baps av yesterday's baking

from Pennycuik's, and tell thim I'll pay thim on Monday.'

Mick was away and back again with the whisky, the herrings, and the bread in marvellously quick time. The mother raked together and kindled some half-burnt chips of coal, and cooked the herrings, which she divided with praiseworthy fairness into three portions, and immediately betook herself to the consideration of her own share and the whisky. But Nat hardly touched his portion, though his brother tried to press and coax him to eat.

'I'm no hungry, Mick, ye ken, only tired—mortal tired, avick. I think I'll go to bed.'

'To be sure, an' to-morrow's Sunday, an' ye'll hae a fine rest.'

'But we'll gang till the school, Mick?'

'Ay, we'll gang till the school, if ye're no too tired, laddie,' answered Mick.

On the following morning, after they had made a somewhat cheerless breakfast on some cold porridge left over from the preceding morning, the two brothers set off for the Sunday school. Are you surprised that these two poor

street strollers should be found attending Sunday school? Well, it had happened in this way. A hard-working city missionary (the adjective is almost superfluous, for a city missionary, unless he be an out-and-out sham—a rare thing, I imagine — is necessarily a hard worker) had found out the two boys, and got their mother to allow them to come to the Sunday school which he had recently started. The widow O'Keefe was not difficult to persuade in the matter, for she was quite indifferent as to what became of the two boys on Sunday.

Mick and Nat liked going to the Sunday school. It was pleasanter than their own small, sordid, untidy cellar; for the room in which the school was held was at least clean, and fresh, and airy. Moreover, they were taught by a lady who had a soft, kind voice, and a happy knack of dealing with boys so as to interest and attract them. This lady left her pleasant home in a fashionable quarter of the town to come down here among the slums and alleys every Sunday morning to teach a class of poor and ignorant boys. Perhaps it was Quixotic; but

the work was, in some respects, by no means of the most agreeable sort, at least to the tastes of many people; and we may suppose that it was not without some effort and resolution that Miss Elmslie had undertaken it, for in their season she was fond of the lightsome and pleasurable things of life as well as her neighbours.

In the afternoon of that day, little Nat had remained at home, if you can apply that word, so suggestive of warmth, and comfort, and kindliness, to the cold and cheerless cellar. Mick went out for a ramble towards the fields and open country which surround Greyborough. He would have been glad if Nat could have accompanied him, for the afternoon was bright and fine, and it was pleasant enough in the open country. But Nat was too tired to join his brother, and lay stretched upon his truckle bed spelling out a book—he could read simple, easy language—which had been lent him from the Sunday school. Mrs. O'Keefe was out gossiping with a neighbour, a woman whose week-day vocation was that of keeping a stall for the sale of oranges, nuts, and hardbake.

Mick returned at dusk. Nat, who was very observant of his brother, as Mick was of him, noticed that he wore an unusually grave look. Mrs. O'Keefe had hot porridge ready for their supper, but again Nat hardly touched his portion.

'What's come upon yez that ye don't eat, Nat? Is it dainty ye're grown on a suddint. Faix, an' ye're likely to fare badly if that's what's the matter wid yez.'

'Don't jaw at Nat, mother,' said Mick. (I should be no truthful chronicler if I put refinements of speech into Mick's mouth.) 'Can ye no see the lad's weak an' ill, more be token that it's through being dead tired wid dancin' every day.'

'Faix, thin, he'll just have to be tired an' begin again like the rest of us; for at it ye must both go again no later than the morning.'

Mick paused before replying. His eyes and mouth were putting on a firm, not to say dogged look, which escaped his mother's notice, but not Nat's. Nat wondered silently, but he little knew what was coming.

'Mother, I'm gaun to say something, an' if ye dinna like it, ye maun dae the other thing,' began Mick in a resolute voice; 'I'm gaun to gie up this Savoyard business.'

'Mrs. O'Keefe stared at her eldest-born full two minutes before she found words to reply—a long period when it is considered that she was by no means a lady who suffered from a dearth of words. Nat's mind was pretty equally divided between astonishment and fear, and he almost shook at Mick's bold declaration.

'Going to give up the business, are yez, honey? And maybe ye'll tell us what other of the polite purfessions ye're thinkin' av takin' up wid,' said Mrs. O'Keefe at length. 'Is it a bailie, or a judge, or a mimber of Parlymint, maybe, that ye're makin' arrangements for?'

Mrs. O'Keefe's fine sarcasm fell scatheless upon her eldest-born. Mick had one purpose steadily before him at this moment, and it absorbed him.

'Didn't yez say yersel' the other night, mother, that the business was nigh played out?

'We must go on wid it for a while yet, anyhow, till we can think av something else. The luck's been agin us for a while past, but it'll turn agin, maybe. When ye take to something that'll keep us all like bailies, maybe I'll think av giving up street strolling intirely, Mick.'

'Well, mother, I'm no gaun on wi't much longer, anyhow,' said Mick boldly. 'It's wearin' Nat out intirely, and what's mair, it's no' richt.'

'No' richt, what do yez mane?'

'The teacher said to-day that all kind av diciption was wrong. She meant it was just a lee—that's what she meant. Now our whole life's a diciption from mornin' to nicht, barrin' Sundays, and so our whole life's a lee,' said Mick, leaping from his premises to his conclusion with swift but unerring logic.

'A lie is it, ye spalpeen? An' is this what yer Sunday schooling has come to, to make ye despise the trade ye get yer bread by? If I'd thought that that was all ye were to gain from the school, not wan blessed stip should ye have set in it.'

'Well, that's done wid now, mother. Nat

and I have learned as it's wrang to lee. It's bad enough to tell one lie, even whin ye're sore pressed, as poor folk like us sometimes are, but it's far waur to go on leeing from morn till nicht. I dinna ken what Savoyards may really be, or whaur they live, but I ken we're no Savoyards ony way, and we go about pretending we are, deceiving folk, an' getting their money. It's nigh as bad as thieving, mother,—waur than thieving when ye're maybe starving. Folk about here ken we're no Savoyards, but heaps o' folk think we are, and maybe gie us money more readily because they believe we're foreign folk, when we talk our few bits o' gibberish.'

Mrs. O'Keefe's anger had been gradually rising while Mick was speaking. Nat was all the time sitting in silent fear for the results of Mick's temerity. Mick had given him no hint as to his present astonishing course of action.

'See here, me lad,' said Mrs. O'Keefe in a decided tone and with enforced calm, 'let's have no more av this humbug, or I'll skelp yez

widin an inch av yer life—I will. Ye'll just begin agin to-morrow as usual, an' until I bid ye lave off, ye'll fiddle every day; an' if ye play any thricks, and fiddle badly for spite or mischief, look out when I get yez home.'

'Ye may skelp me till I'm black and blue, mother, but not a hand's turn o' fiddling will I do till we lave off blackening our faces, and go about as plain folk. If yez will do that, thin I'll fiddle for a while yet, though the dancin's mortal hard on Nat; an' as soon as I can get something else to do, and can keep Nat widout dancin', I'll do it. But I'll no go on tellin' a lee day after day ony langer. Gin there be a God at all, He canna like to see folk leein' all day; and I'm no gaun to do it—there now.'

Mrs. O'Keefe was now fairly roused, and boiling over with anger. She made a sudden and unexpected swoop upon Mick, caught him by the shoulder, and dealt him such a heavy blow with her clenched hand on the side of his head, that the boy reeled backward and fell to the ground. Nat uttered a quick cry of fear,

though the sight of his mother striking his brother was not an entirely novel one.

'Get to bed wid yez this instant, ye ongrateful, impudent little wretch ye; an' if ye don't rise in the mornin' in a different temper and ready for work, I'll flay ye alive. Now, don't give me another word of your sauce, ye omadhaum.'

'Don't say onything mair just now, Mick,' whispered Nat in his brother's ear. 'Come to bed, avick, or she'll kill ye outright. Ye've raised her fearful.' Mick was now half afraid that his mother, in her fury, might turn upon Nat too, and so he inwardly resolved to call a truce for the present. He lay down beside Nat on the ragged pallet bed, and was quiet. But he whispered in his brother's ear, 'My mind's made up all the same, Nat. I'll quit this trade as soon as iver there's a chance. It's wearin' ye to death, honey, and it's wrang a'thegither. Ye ken that, acora, as well's I do, an' betther, for ye're a betther lad than I am. Ye never sweired that I can remember; an' afore we went till the schule, I hae sweired mony a time.

But gang till sleep noo, avick; ye're sair tired, I can see, an' I'll no fight wid mother ony mair the noo.'

Mrs. O'Keefe was now composing herself to slumber—her anger cooling gradually down since Mick had desisted from opposition—in another corner of the room.

PART II.

ON the following morning Mrs. O'Keefe and the two boys prepared to renew their weekly labour; for what was perhaps sometimes fun to their audience, was hard and weary enough work to them. Mick and Nat stained their faces and hands to the requisite degree of brownness with a liquid prepared for the purpose, and donned their worn and faded masquerade, and their mother did the same.

Mick spoke little. A night's sleep had not obliterated or in the least degree shaken his resolve. But he possessed caution as well as resolution. He feared another outbreak from his mother, lest some portion of her anger should fall on Nat. He did not greatly fear for his own personal comfort or safety; his tough and wiry body could stand a good deal of rough handling. But in his heart he was as determined

as ever to abandon his present mode of life on the first chance that offered. What other means of livelihood could he take to for his own and Nat's support?—that was his difficulty.

The trio began operations to-day in a busy thoroughfare of the city, but towards the afternoon made their way westward among quiet streets and squares. This was the finest and most fashionable quarter of Greyborough.

Mrs. O'Keefe and the two boys paused before a house in a handsome terrace, and began their performance,—Mrs. O'Keefe rattling her tambourine, Mick scraping at his fiddle, and little Nat going through his queer, shuffling jig, which is doubtless the correct and characteristic national dance of the Savoyard peasant. Mick had often wished that it had been his office to dance and Nat's to play the fiddle, for Mick was far fitter physically to sustain the much heavier exertion which the dancing involved.

A little group had quickly gathered round the Savoyards, by no means composed altogether of well-dressed people, for even fashionable quarters have their back streets, whose

juvenile population are ever ready to gather, with marvellous rapidity, at any sign of a street show.

While the trio are engaged in their fantastic, and, it must be confessed, somewhat dreary performance, we must leave them for a little, and introduce the readers inside the house opposite which they are performing. If you will look up at the windows, you will see a face at it—a thin, pale face of a boy. It is into the room where the possessor of the face is seated that I would like to take you.

What a contrast the room presents to the cellar which is all that Mick and Nat can call a home! Outside, though there is a bright sun, a keen east wind, which is Greyborough's favourite wind at this season of the year, is blowing, so that the large bright fire is not a whit too large or bright. Its light falls on warm-coloured curtains, soft carpets, handsome furniture, mirrors, and fine engravings. It is, to be sure, a solid and substantial-looking room rather than a pretty and graceful one,—somewhat dark and sombre in its colouring,—for the Greyburghers incline to the solid and durable

rather than to the lightsome and the picturesque in their houses; but there could be no doubt about the comfort of the room.

Besides the boy at the window, there are two other occupants of the apartment,—a lady, seated at the table with some work, and a girl in an easy-chair near the fire reading.

The boy at the window is half sitting, half reclining on a sofa, propped up with cushions. He looks about fifteen years old, has large dark eyes, which seem all the larger from the thinness and pallor of his face, and very fine and abundant brown hair. The face would be decidedly handsome were it not so thin.

Hugh Frankland had been a prisoner to his sofa for nearly three years. He had a severe accident at football at school, which had injured his spine grievously. Nothing but time, absolute rest, and patience, the doctors said, could restore him to anything like his original health and strength, and, to say truth, poor Hugh was finding that it needed all his patience. At first it seemed that it required more patient endurance than he was possessed of; for that

is not just the quality that boys are usually strongest in. But Time, an old Greek poet says, is a gentle god, and Hugh Frankland had at last found it so.

Hugh seldom rose from his sofa. The most he could do was to walk slowly across the room once or twice a day; but for this he was now thankful, for it was a certain sign of improvement. His favourite position was near the window, where he could see what was going on in the street; for he sometimes wearied of reading, though naturally fond of it.

Poor enough as the performance of the O'Keefe family was, Hugh watched it with some interest; so small a thing in the shape of a show made a change in the day for him now.

'It's a queer sort of life to lead, going about singing and dancing all day. I wonder if they find any pleasure in it. These Savoyards have always a sort of smile on their faces, as if they were rather enjoying the thing.'

'I suspect that is all in the play, Hugh—part of their stock-in-trade. I can't imagine that they can find much actual pleasure in their per-

formance. Street performers of all kinds seem to me very weary, though possibly custom may make them to some extent indifferent to their weariness. But actual enjoyment in their business I don't think they can know much of,' said Mrs. Frankland.

'The little dancing boy looks awfully tired at this moment,' said Hugh.

Hugh's sister Kate came forward to the window as her brother spoke.

'Yes, he seems almost ready to drop,' she said. 'See how languidly his poor little legs are going now, as if he were just forcing himself to dance; and how thin his face is! I shall throw them a few coppers; shall I, mamma?'

'If you like, dear. Who knows, the boys may have had no breakfast, or a very insufficient one, though I suppose this is just "indiscriminate charity," against which we are so frequently being warned.'

'Well, we'll chance it this time, mother,' said Hugh. Just fancy having to go through a day's work such as theirs on a breakfast, perhaps, of a few scraps of dry bread!'

'Still that is all supposition on our part, Hugh,' said his sister. They *may* not be so poor as all that. I think I have read stories of street performers, and even beggars, — blind beggars especially, — making quite a lot of money.'

'That little dancing boy doesn't look just as if he lived on the fat of the land; does he, Kate?' said Hugh, with a smile.

'Well, no, not exactly;' and as she spoke Kate opened the window, and threw down some coppers which she had wrapped up in a piece of paper. Mick had seized the small package almost before it touched the ground.

'The boy with the violin looks strong enough,' said Kate.

'Hardy, perhaps, but not over well fed either, I think,' said Hugh. 'Well, well, how thankless and ungrateful many of us are for the things we have—at least I know I have often been. For a good while after my accident I often felt impatient and fretful, and thought that no one was so unlucky and badly used as I was; and yet, at the worst, I don't suppose I have had so

much to bear as these poor Savoyards—badly housed, perhaps, poorly fed, and obliged to fag on at their monotonous business though ever so tired, and in all kinds of weather.'

'I am glad, my dear boy, that now, at least, you have learned to bear your trial so patiently. God has dealt gently with you in your illness, has He not, Hugh?'

'Yes, mother, I feel that now, though I did not quite at first. Supposing, as might have been the case, I had been a poor boy, and this accident had come upon me—how different things would have been! I have everything about me to lighten and brighten my misfortune,—for I suppose it is a misfortune in one way of looking at it,—everything to help me to bear my illness more easily; if we had been poor,—if I had only such a home as those Savoyards will return to to-night probably,—how much harder upon me my illness would have been!'

'That is the right way to look at the matter, there can be no doubt, Hugh.'

'Hugh is developing into quite a philosopher,' said Kate, who was a little older than her brother.

'But is it quite right to take a sort of satisfaction in thinking others are worse off than ourselves? Sometimes I doubt if it is. It seems just one sort of selfishness.'

Hugh looked a little puzzled at Kate's suggestion. He wasn't much given to philosophize himself, in spite of what his sister had said. He usually went direct at a question, and took its uppermost and most manifest meaning.

'It is quite allowable to make such a comparison as Hugh has done, Kate,' said Mrs. Frankland. 'As long as we do not increase our own good fortune or happiness at the expense of others, there is nothing wrong in being thankful that our case is not so bad as it might have been,—in other words, not so hard as many are called to bear. We do not in these cases take satisfaction in the thought that others are suffering more than we are, for possibly they are not; with their greater trial they may have greater powers of endurance. We are simply thankful that God has not called us to bear a heavier cross than our strength could perhaps have borne. Do I make the matter clear to you, Kate?'

'Yes, I think so, mamma. Yours is the true philosophy, I have no doubt.'

'It is, I think, Kate, if there is a Providence at all; it is the philosophy which the Bible teaches. I haven't yet found out a better or a nobler.'

'They're away now,' said Hugh, alluding to the Savoyards; 'and I shouldn't think that little fellow's sorry the day's about done. He'll sleep well to-night, anyway, I warrant. He has the advantage of me there at any rate, but he certainly needs it more.'

The O'Keefes moved away down the street eastward again. The mother walked a little way in front, and the two boys followed side by side. As they came to the end of the street, and were turning into a narrower but busier one, filled with shops and offices instead of private houses, a sudden outcry arose among the passers-by. 'Hi! hi! look out! stop him! stop him!' was shouted from mouth to mouth, and the next moment a runaway horse, dragging a grocer's cart, came rushing round the corner. There was no driver,—the horse had taken fright and bolted while left standing in front of a shop,—and the

cart rocked and swayed from side to side as the horse came on at full gallop.

It was down upon the O'Keefes, who were walking in the middle of the road, before they were in the least aware. Mrs. O'Keefe rushed to the side of the street; Mick darted at Nat, and seized him by the shoulders. But he was too late. Nat, less steady on his feet than his wont from fatigue and languor, slipped and fell as Mick caught hold of him, and in another moment the shaft of the cart struck him, and he was down on the ground among the wheels. The horse and cart passed on unchecked in their mad career, but a wheel had gone over Nat's leg, and he lay on the ground in a faint, Mick stooping over him in an agony of fear and grief.

In a few moments a crowd had gathered round. A policeman lifted Nat from the ground.

'Puir laddie! he's clean fainted, an' his leg's broke, I doubt. We must get him till the hospital at once,' said the policeman.

'Oh, he's no deid—he's no deid, sir!' cried Mick.

'Na, na, no sae bad as that—ye needna' be feart for that, my man,' answered the policeman not unkindly. 'But he'll be in the hospital for a while, I doubt. They'll take guid care o' the laddie there.'

'Whirra! whirra! mother agrah, what'll we dae at all, at all?' said Mick. 'They're gaun to tak Nat till the hospital.'

'The boy must just go there, Mick,' said Mrs. O'Keefe, herself a little frightened and excited by what had happened. 'They'll take better care of him in the hospital than we could, and he'll get well quicker too.'

A cab was presently procured, and in it Nat was conveyed to the hospital, accompanied by the policeman, Mrs. O'Keefe, and Mick. Nat remained unconscious during the whole of the drive, but the restoratives that were applied at the hospital revived him. He was placed in bed, examined, and preparations were at once begun for the proper treatment of the broken limb.

'Sure, ye'll let me stay by him, won't ye, sir?' said Mick, with great earnestness, to the doctor.

'Altogether, do you mean?' said the doctor.

'Ay, I'll help nurse him and watch up by him, ye ken.'

'I'm afraid we'll hardly be able to manage that. Your brother will have every care and attention, you needn't be afraid,' said the doctor, smiling a little, but at the same time wondering at the earnestness of Mick's manner, and at the evident affection of this poor ragged boy for his younger brother.

'You may visit him whenever you like, you know,' he added kindly; 'though at first, perhaps, we shall not be able to let you stay very long with him at one time. Your brother will be very weak for a time, you know.'

So Mick went away with his mother very quiet, sad and heavy at heart, his only consolation being that he might see Nat whenever he wished.

PART III.

NAT'S broken leg set well, and he progressed favourably. Still he suffered much from pain and weakness. It had, of course, been very quickly discovered that the O'Keefes were not genuine Savoyards. Their speech immediately betrayed them, and Mrs. O'Keefe made no attempt to keep up the deception before the people at the hospital. All the dark colour disappeared from Nat's face and hands the first time they were bathed by the nurse, revealing a very pale little face, whose hue was the very reverse of that which should appertain to a native of the South.

Some of the elder people about the hospital —the nurses, and others—were inclined to look a little grave when they understood the real state of the case: but I am afraid the young

house doctors and surgeons regarded the matter rather as a good joke.

'I didn't think we were quite so advanced in Greyborough as this comes to,' said one to his fellows, laughing. 'When I was in London, I used to hear frequently of this sort of thing, you know—sham Italian organ-men, sham Indian jugglers, sham blind men, sham sailors with sham wooden legs, and the rest. We used to have them brought to Guy's sometimes with accidents. But I hardly fancied this kind of thing had reached Greyborough; I should hardly have thought it was worth the candle. It wants a big place to make the game pay, I imagine.'

'Well, I hope there isn't much of it,' said the elder doctor, who had had the setting of Nat's leg. 'It is certainly one of the evils incidental to great cities, not one of the advantages.'

It need hardly be said that Nat received just as much care and attention as if he had never been a party to any deception at all. Everybody believed that he could be very little to blame in the matter; and even if they had thought otherwise, it would have made no difference in the

treatment Nat received. The hospital's function primarily was to deal with the bodily distresses of its inmates, and it did so without regard to their moral condition.

In fact, Nat's case excited much interest and sympathy. He was very patient under his pain and langour, and he soon became a prime favourite with the nurses and the doctors. Mick came to the hospital every day, and the time he was allowed to spend by Nat's bedside grew longer and longer as Nat himself became stronger.

Mrs. O'Keefe came sometimes to see her son too, but she didn't often stay long with him. She did not find much to say to Nat, nor, to tell the truth, did Nat to her. Whereas Mick had had many a rough passage of arms with his mother, sometimes ending in blows on Mrs. O'Keefe's part, Nat had generally been silent and submissive in his mother's presence. He had little of the tough, combative spirit which prompted Mick to resistance.

Mrs. O'Keefe regarded Nat's accident as a misfortune as much to herself as to the boy.

Nat, though the youngest, was perhaps the most important member of the little performing company, inasmuch as his youth, and his manifestly frail person, often induced the onlookers to bestow their pence out of pure compassion. Mrs. O'Keefe was perfectly aware of this, and so Nat's inability to take his place in the performance annoyed and irritated her.

Immediately after the boy's accident, her receipts began to fall off, and she chafed at the fact. She did not exactly blame Nat for this state of matters,—for she could hardly do that, and she really felt a sort of pity for him in his suffering,—but she made herself believe that she was a most unfortunate and ill-used woman, that everything was 'going agen her,' and that wherever the blame lay, it was not with her.

Her temper, it may be supposed, did not improve under these circumstances; and I am afraid that the conditions of Mick's home life at this time were not any easier or more comfortable. But Mick was indifferent to the variations in his mother's temper. He was at present wholly absorbed in Nat's condition and in his

progress towards convalescence, and his visits to the hospital were what he daily looked forward to. He made them in the evening,—the days were now getting pretty long,—after he had been out with his mother tramping the streets all day. Mick was never so tired but that he always set off with alacrity for the hospital.

One day after Nat had been in the hospital about a fortnight, Mick, on approaching his brother's bedside, found a lady seated by it. He at once knew her. She was Miss Farquhar, his and Nat's Sunday-school teacher.

'Well, Mick, how do you do?' Miss Farquhar said in a frank, kind voice. 'Are you surprised to find me here? Well, I should have been to see your brother sooner, but I was out of town when his accident happened, and I only came back on Monday. I heard from Mr. Mailer about poor Nat's accident, and so I came here to see how he was getting on. I am glad to find he is progressing so nicely.' Mr. Mailer was the city missionary and superintendent of the Sunday school. Miss Farquhar had learned

all about the kind of life which the two boys followed. It had surprised her a good deal, but her chief feeling in the matter was pity for Mick and Nat.

After talking a little while about Nat's illness, and assuring Mick that it would only be a matter of time with his brother until he should get quite well again, Miss Farquhar said—

'Do you like your kind of life, Mick?'

'No, Miss, I dinna care for it—nor Nat either, I go bail; and I care for it less than iver by the same token, now that I know its wrong to be going about pretending to be what yez aint.'

'Well, Mick, I must say I think you're quite right.'

'I mind what yez told us yersel one day at the school, Miss, about how it was just as bad to act a lie as to tell ane, ye ken. Now mother an' us acts a regular downright lie 'maist every day of our lives barrin' Sundays.'

Miss Farquhar was not a little astonished at Mick's eager manner, and bold, earnest speech. There was no mistaking the genuineness of his manner.

'Well, Mick, I must say I think you are quite right. I hope all my scholars at the school remember what they hear as well as you seem to do.'

'An' it *is* wrong, sure, Miss, to make believe to be what you're not, isna it?' said Mick earnestly.

'No doubt of it, Mick. God wishes us to be honest men and women, both in what we do and what we say. A clever writer has said that an honest man is the noblest work of God, and I think he is very near the truth; for an honest man is almost certain to be a good man, and a good man must be an honest one. Of course, it is just the same with boys and younger people. Our Heavenly Father must delight to see a boy who both fears and scorns to tell a falsehood.'

'An' we're just doing that same, pretending to be foreign folk, aren't we, Miss?' questioned Mick again, eager to get a definite opinion from Miss Farquhar.

'Yes, I'm afraid you are doing something very like it, Mick. Have you always followed the same kind of life?'

'Ever sin' I can mind, Miss. Feyther died just after Nat was born, ye ken, and I dinna mind what we did whan he wor alive. Mither learned Nat to dance soon as ever he could walk well-nigh, an' she learned me the fiddle by the same token. Mother's main cliver, ye ken; and Nat's a stunner to dance whan he's no too tired; an' I'm no that bad wi' the fiddle mysel', an' I can play the bagpipes forbye. Whiles I play thim instid av the fiddle,' said Mick, with a faint sense of pride in the family accomplishments, which may possibly have revealed the artistic temperament.

Miss Farquhar could not help smiling, nor could the doctor, who had come up while Mick was speaking. Mick's oddly composite speech, an Irish idiom often following quick upon the heels of a Scotch word or phrase, much amused the old doctor, and he had often lingered by Nat's bedside to listen to the two boys' talk.

'It's quite a study in philosophy. Mick's language might have afforded Grimm himself valuable hints in the construction of his law of language,' the doctor said, laughing to Miss

Farquhar; but Mick, of course, did not understand the allusion.

'Mick is not at all satisfied with his present mode of life, Doctor Armstrong,' said Miss Farquhar.

'I daresay not. Hard work and poor pay it must be for the most part. This poor little fellow is little fitted for such weary drudgery.'

'It is not altogether that, however, doctor. Mick knows that it is not the best kind of life for Nat, and that he is often very tired at night. But he has other reasons for wishing to give it up. He thinks it is not right; that it is deception and dishonest altogether.'

'Well, I suppose there can't be much doubt about its being deception,' answered Dr. Armstrong. 'But it's not the poor laddies' fault, I suppose. What are they to do?'

'I'll no do that much langer, onyhow,' said Mick; 'I'm determined upo' that. I'm just waitin' till I get a chance av something else, and until Nat's a' richt again.'

'You seem an honest lad, Mick, notwithstanding your trade,' said the doctor kindly.

'If you are in earnest in wishing for some more reputable kind of occupation, be sure a way will be opened up for you. God won't forsake those who try to be honest and truthful, Mick.'

'No, sir, I'm sure He winna, gin He's still the God we read about in the Bible; by the same token didna He aye stand by the folk who acted straightforward and fair wi' Him, and didna try tae lee and deceive Him—Abraham, an' Joseph, an' David, an' a heap mair?'

'Mick has made some use of his Sunday schooling, you see, doctor; and he has hardly been at school a year,' said Miss Farquhar, who was greatly gratified to find that her work at the Sunday school was bearing such good and practical fruit in the case of this poor, untutored lad.

'Well, Mick, our meeting must close for the present. Nat has seen and heard enough of his friends for one day. He must try and go to sleep now.'

Nat had taken very little share in the latter part of the conversation, but he had been listening to everything with quiet and earnest

attention, wondering now and then at the turn which the talk took, and now and then only half understanding the doctor's and Miss Farquhar's remarks.

Mick and Miss Farquhar left the hospital together, but separated soon after. Her visit to Nat gave Miss Farquhar much thought during her walk home, and it was the first thing she began to talk about to her mother and father on entering the house.

Mary Farquhar was the child of parents in easy circumstances, who gave their daughter pretty much her own way in everything. If she had been of a nature apt to be spoiled, I suspect her parents' complete indulgence of her every wish and thought would have gone far to spoil Mary. But the sunshine of unclouded prosperity and home happiness seemed only to ripen and mellow Mary's character, and not to weaken it by too much warmth.

Had she chosen, she might have lived a life of easeful self-enjoyment, occupied solely with the light and graceful employments and the pleasant distractions of a young woman in the

well-to-do middle-class life of nowadays. But, as has been indicated, Mary had marked out for herself a line of duties, upon which she entered with at least as much heart and goodwill as she did upon her pleasures; and so happily was her nature balanced, that the one did not tempt or disincline her for the other. Let it be noted that I am here sketching no fancy or ideal picture. Happily there are in England at this moment thousands of young women such as Mary Farquhar.

Miss Farquhar visited Nat at the hospital almost daily, and it was seldom that she came empty handed. Some little delicacy to tempt the boy's faint but reviving appetite was usually the prelude to the little talk between her and the patient, and it gave the warm-hearted and sympathetic girl keen pleasure to watch the increasing relish with which poor little Nat discussed his dainty fare. But perhaps as welcome to the boy as the food, was the little bouquet of flowers which Miss Farquhar sometimes substituted for the cup of jelly, bunch of grapes, or what not. The flowers seemed to bring with

them to Nat a waft of country breezes and the breath of waving woodlands, and were at once a delight and a refreshment to the weary boy, for he was sometimes weary from being obliged to lie so much in the same position, though he seldom complained.

But however much Nat enjoyed the various little dainties provided for him by Miss Farquhar, he never forgot one thing. He never ate the whole of anything that was brought him. Be it jelly, or fruit, or sponge-cake, or whatever it was, he left a portion, which he asked to be put aside always with the same words—

'It's awfu' guid, Miss; we'll just put that wee bit away for Mick.'

And when Mick arrived, Nat's eyes lit up with a gleam of pleasure as he watched his brother eat his share of the food, which Mick did with much grave attention, partly because he knew it pleased Nat that he should eat it, and partly because the dainty fare was grateful to the roughly-fed boy. And thus the thoughtfulness and kindliness of Mary Farquhar diffused its gracious influence over quite a wide area.

PART IV.

ALL this time Mary Farquhar was casting about in her mind how her two *protégés*— for as such she now regarded Mick and Nat — might be permanently benefited, — how they might be removed from their present mode of life, and placed in the way of earning their living in some more reputable fashion. Nat would soon be able to leave the hospital, and by and by would be fit for some kind of work. Mary Farquhar was not satisfied in ministering to Nat's present needs; she was exercised about the future lot of him and Mick.

One of Mr. Farquhar's most intimate friends was Mr. James Frankland, Hugh's father; indeed, I believe a bond of relationship existed between the two of that remote kind which it requires the subtle Scottish sense of kinship

to appreciate. At any rate, a strong and cordial friendship existed between the two families.

One afternoon Mary Farquhar set out for the Franklands' house, which was at no great distance from her own home, with an express purpose in her mind. 'I have come to stay to dinner,' she said, as she took off her hat and jacket in Kate Frankland's room.

'That's right, dear. I've been wishing for days back that you would come and stay the evening with us. I want to try that new duet with you. I thought this very day of sending you a post card.'

'Yes, I shall be very glad to play it over with you, Kate; but business first, you know the rest. I ve come principally on a matter of business with your father; perhaps you think I've very little to do with business.'

'Wouldn't like to say what girls mightn't take to nowadays,' replied Kate, laughing. 'Perhaps you have become secretary to some society connected with women's rights, Mary; or you are going to become a candidate for the school board, and want to consult papa as to your

chances of election. Or is it that you wish to invest some money,—I know you have a little private store of your own,—and would like to have papa's advice ?'

'None of your guesses quite hit the gold, Kate,' said Mary, smiling, 'but I am not going to satisfy your curiosity just at present. It's rather a long story, and you must exercise your patience until I unfold it in full conclave at dinner.'

'What an important sound it has, dear ! I am really curious.'

'You will find it a simple enough matter after all, Kate, though it may need some talk and thought before it can be settled.'

'The two girls now rejoined Mrs. Frankland and Hugh in the sitting-room.

At dinner Mary related in detail the story of Mick and Nat O'Keefe, to which the Franklands listened to the close with few interruptions. But towards the end of her narrative a quickened look of intelligence and interest was observable in Hugh's face. His sofa was always wheeled close to the table at dinner-time, for sitting up-

right in a chair still wearied him. When Mary Farquhar had ceased speaking, Hugh at once said:

'How curious! I do believe, mother, those are the two boys who were performing before the window one afternoon some weeks ago—don't you remember? Everything in Mary's description corresponds. The mother is a stout, rather coarse-looking woman, isn't she, Mary?'

'Yes. I have seen Mrs. O'Keefe only once, but she is undoubtedly stout, and can hardly be called refined-looking,' said Mary Farquhar.

'I remember the people now you recall them to me, Hugh, though I must say the circumstance had quite passed out of my mind,' said Mrs. Frankland.

'You see, mother, you and Kate have many more things to occupy you than I have at present, so probably a small thing remains longer in my memory. I have thought several times of that little dancing boy.'

'Yes, I remember him now too, and how we all thought he looked so tired,' said Kate.

'Well, Mary, as to your wish that the two

boys should be put upon some way of doing honestly for themselves, have you any ideas yourself upon the point?' said Mr. Frankland.

'That is just what I wish to consult you about, Mr. Frankland. Neither papa nor mamma, nor myself, have yet been able to hit upon any plan which we think quite practicable.'

'Will the mother be any obstacle?' said Mrs. Frankland.

'She may prove a bit of a Tartar; she had rather a bold, vixenish look, if I remember,' said Kate.

'We must try to manage Mrs. O'Keefe by a judicious mixture of firmness and policy.'

'The gentle in manner and the determined in action, as the old Latins used to put it, eh, Kate?' said Mr. Frankland.

'No doubt we shall have to use determination with Mrs. O'Keefe if she will not listen to reason, but I am in hope that she will.'

'You must try plenty of her country's weapon in argument, Mary—blarney—before you resort to the other alternative,' said Hugh.

'Well, Mary, this is all I can promise at

present,' said Mr. Frankland, 'and I know you don't expect me to have a plan cut and dry for you at a moment's notice. If you come again the day after to-morrow, say, I will think over the matter meanwhile, and propose something then. And how would it do if you brought Mick with you, and we took him into our counsels?'

'I shall do that very willingly; I daresay Mick could come some time during the evening.'

'Very well, then, let it be so. And now I suppose the subject has been ventilated, to use that charming newspaper phrase, as much as it is capable of being by us, for the present at least.'

On the day appointed, Mary Farquhar arrived at the Franklands' house, bringing Mick O'Keefe with her. Mick had done his very best, poor boy, to make himself presentable. He could not do much himself towards rendering his ragged garments less ragged and piecemeal, and it had never entered into his head to ask his mother to patch or darn them. Such supervision of her children's outer man had never

been deemed by Mrs. O'Keefe to fall within her sphere of maternal duties. But Mick had at least made himself look clean. It was a matter of extreme difficulty to make his hands appear anything but dark, rough, and weather-stained, but his face shone with a brilliancy that showed that it was still capable of a high degree of polish.

Mick was first taken to the kitchen, and there supplied with a plentiful tea, to which, notwithstanding the very considerable feeling of shyness he was experiencing, he did good justice. Then he ascended to the dining-room, much fortified and assured by the good fare of which he had partaken, the frequent and natural effect of a generous meal upon a hungry mortal—man or boy. Mick now felt competent to answer any question of a practical, everyday sort that might be put to him. Miss Farquhar took the boy by the hand as he entered the room, and Mr. Frankland shook hands with him.

'Well, Mick, my lad,' the latter began in a frank, kindly voice, 'this young lady and I have just been settling a plan between us of which

we want your approval—we want to know what you think of it, that is. I have a house in the country some twenty miles from here, you must know, and at the gate of the house there is a lodge. You know what that is?'

'Ay, sir, a bit roond house maistly, wi' creepers growing ower it, an' a man rins out by the same token, an' opens the gate tae the carriage folk.'

'Right, Mick! a portrait in a sentence! Yes, Mick, a man is always in the little house ready to open the gate; but it needn't necessarily be a man, you know. A woman will do just as well.'

'Ay, I ken that, sir.'

'Well, we require a lodge-keeper at this very time. We are all going into the country soon, and there will need to be some one always in the lodge. Our present lodge-keeper—who is a woman—is leaving us. Now, what I want to ask you is this, do you think your mother would give up her present business and take the post of lodge-keeper?'

The proposal came upon Mick, as may be

imagined, with a great surprise, and he did not immediately answer. But he was a boy whose thoughts worked rapidly, and in a few moments he had sufficiently recovered from his wonder as to be able to answer somewhat slowly:

'Faix, sir, I couldna just say for certain, but I think she wad, more by token that business has been awfu' dull this lang time, ye ken. Mither's rale clever forbye, an' gin she once set her mind till kapin' a lodge, I go bail she'd do it as weel's the lave o' folk.'

'Well, Mick, do you think you can manage the matter with your mother?'

'I'll thry, sir; but perhaps Miss Farquhar would say a word wid mither too.'

'Yes, Mick, I intend to see her, and I'll do my best.'

'An' what am I to do, sir, an' Nat? Nat'll soon be up an' about agin noo.'

'We've thought of that too, Mick. I thought you might make yourself very useful in helping in the garden, and by and by you might turn out a first-rate gardener,

and make good wages. How would you like that?'

'Ye're awfu' kind, sir,' said Mick, beginning to feel almost embarrassed by the wide vista of prosperity that had so suddenly opened out before him. 'It'll suit me fine. I'll just tak' till the gardening uncommon after a bit, gin ony one will be sae guid as to teach me things. An' I'm fine and hardy, ye ken; I can stan' a heap o' hard work an' knockin' about. Mither may ding my heid agin the wa', an' I dinna mind by the same token—I'm that tough, ye ken.'

'All the same I hope your mother won't think it necessary to test your hardiness in that way much oftener, Mick,' said Mr. Frankland as they were all laughing.

'I hope not, sir. It's whan times are hardest wi' us, and mither's more pit about than ordinar' that she does that; an' times'll no be hard wi' us nae mair, noo, I go bail. An' about Nat, sir —what'll he dae?'

'Well, Mick, I think we'll give Nat a little more schooling first, and after that I daresay

we'll find something suitable for him to do.'

'That'll suit Nat fine, sir. He's morthal cliver wid his heid—learns his lessons for the Sunday school as quick agen as me.'

'Well then, Mick, everything is arranged so far. Miss Farquhar will come and see your mother to-morrow evening, and talk this matter over with her.'

Mick again, in rough but genuine fashion, expressed his thanks, gave a series of ducks and bobs as he backed out of the room, and so withdrew.

Miss Farquhar had less difficulty in persuading Mrs. O'Keefe to fall in with the plan that had been devised for her children's and her own benefit than she had anticipated. Mrs. O'Keefe was by no means so wedded to her present mode of life as Mary somehow imagined. Mary had thought that perhaps these Bohemians of society, accustomed to a free wandering unfettered life, were slow to abandon it for a less precarious but more conventional and responsible one.

But Mrs. O'Keefe was really a shrewd and practical woman. She at once saw the advantages of the life that was now offered her, its greater ease and comfort—food and clothing and house-room assured, with no overflow of work in return. Her rough and haphazard existence had by no means rendered her insensible to the comfortable things of life, and familiarity with weariness and sometimes with hunger, though it may have rendered her in a measure indifferent to these hardships, had hardly made her enamoured of them.

She was very civil to Miss Farquhar, and fell in with all Mary's suggestions with little dissent. She was, indeed, much softened by the manifest desire which her new friends and patrons were showing to help and befriend her.

'I'm poor at thanks, Miss,—I've not had much chance av practice in that way,—but I do thank ye from the bottom o' me heart. I've had a sore battle wid the world, Miss, all me days; an' hardship roughens an' hardens the

the most o' people. But the tide's turning in my favour now, an' maybe I'll be none the worse woman for it. Anyways, I'll thry my best.'

It was a glad day truly for Mick and Nat, that first one in their new home—a bright, sunshiny day in early summer, when the woods were in their fresh soft green, and the song of the thrush and the blackbird thrilled from every tree and thicket. The two boys were delighted with the little lodge house, which indeed seemed to them like a palace; delighted with all its surroundings—the large garden and park, and the fields and the woods beyond; dumb almost with delight at everything. The contrast between their new home and the old one was almost more than they could at once realize.

The Franklands had been occupying the house for some days, and Mary Farquhar was with them on a visit. On the evening of the day on which the O'Keefes arrived, she walked down to the lodge to see them.

'We'll all be as happy here as the birds in

the trees beyant, Miss,' said Mrs. O'Keefe. 'I'll be a better mother to the children from this, Miss, an' I'll keep steady from the dhrink. I wor never a drunkard, ye understand, Miss.'

'God is dealing kindly with you now, Mrs. O'Keefe. It would be the veriest ingratitude not to feel thankful and grateful to Him in return, and to try one's best to live such a life as it must please Him to see, would it not?'

'Troth an' it would, Miss; an' I'll do my best to keep your words in mind. It's hard work not to forget there's a God at all in a poor tramper's life, on the street from week's end to week's end, an' that tired on the Sunday sometimes that yez can think only av' sleepin'. But now, with God's help, I'll thry and do me duty, both by Him and by thim as has stretched out a helping hand to me childer an' me.'

'Nae mair deceivin' and leeing now, Miss,' exclaimed Mick in a voice approaching to exultation. 'Fair, honest work for mither and me, and Nat too, by and by. Nat an' me dinna

forget who to thank in our prayers nicht an' mornin', Miss; by the same token we jist slip in your name whiles, if ye'll no be offended. Sure, there's nae wrang in that, is there? And Nat 'll soon get strong an' hearty now. He can hirple aboot fine a'ready, an' ye see he's getting red and quite hearty in the cheeks.'

'I whiles think a' our fortune's come aboot through Mick,' said Nat seriously. 'He wouldna tell a lee, ye ken, Miss, not though mither dinged him ever so. Mick minded what ye sae often told us in the Sunday school, Miss. Ye aye said that God saw us everywhere an' at all times, an' was sair pit aboot when we did wrang. An' sae Mick wouldna go on tellin' a lee; an' noo mither 'll nae ding him for that or onything else ony mair.'

'There's no need for your giving up your fiddle altogether, now that you don't need to play for a living, Mick,' said Miss Farquhar.

'I hae nae thocht o' doing that, Miss. I'm rale fond av me fiddle, ye ken; an' I mean to mak' mysel' a fine player if I can. I'll hae heaps

o' chances o' practising noo. An' mebbe I'll some day play weel enough that the folks at the hoose 'll like tae hae me up tae gae them a tune; an' it's proud I'll be, sure, when that same happens.'

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