

Two of a Trust

by Marie Corelli, 1855-1924

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THERE was a dense fog in the City. For the benefit of any uninstructed foreigner who may not know what a dense fog in the City is like, it should perhaps be explained that the air was full of a thick, brown-black, coagulated matter which smelt like rotten cheese, and choked the throats and lungs of every creature that was forced to breathe in it. Moreover, that this noxious atmosphere created such a darkness, that though the hour was noon, it might have been midnight. The electric lamps gleamed fitfully, like unmanageable searchlights, through the poisonous haze, and the moving throng of men, women and vehicles presented a shapeless confusion of crawling matter resembling the black spawn of insects struggling with life for a moment and then vanishing into nothingness again. Outside one big building which loomed into the blinding yellow vapours, with lights on either side of it like two demon eyes whose glittering reflection made the fog more densely visible, a tall lanky boy and a very small thin one, stood together. The very small thin boy was crying, and rubbing his little fists, blue with cold, into his eyes with quite a desperate air of misery, while his tall lanky companion, with hands thrust down as deeply as possible into very ragged trouser pockets, was watching his grimy tears with an almost whimsical air of perplexity.

“Now, look ’ere, Ikey,” he said, presently—“Do ‘ee stop turnin’ on the water-pipes. Can’t ‘ee do it nohow?”

“Ikey” sniffed a prolonged and terrible sniff, but offered no reply.

“When did yer mother go parst?” proceeded the tall youth.

“Yesserday night,” blubbered Ikey—”Er corfed ‘erself away!”

“An’ ye ain’t got no one now to look arter ye?”

Another dismal sniff gave sufficient confirmation to the fact.

“Turned six, ain’t ye?” the tall boy resumed.

Ikey nodded.

“Ungry, are ye?”

Here there was a pause. Suddenly Ikey lifted up his voice and gave vent to an alarming bellow.

“Oh—boo—hoo!” he howled.—“Hoo—hoo!

Boo—hoo! I can’t eat nothink since ‘er corfed ‘erself away!”

The tall boy uttered a low whistle. The position was crucial.

“Look ’ere, Ikey,” he said—“you mustn’t do that noise! It turns my stummick cold! You wants a bit o’ dinner, that’s what’s the matter. ‘Tain’t no use ‘owlin’ to the fog—if so be yer mother’s gone parst, she’s out of it, an’ there ain’t no gettin’ of ‘er back. Carn’t ye do no ‘Apenny Mail sellin’ no more?”

“Dunno!” sobbed Ikey—“Ef ye’ll let me stay with you, I’ll try!”

“Stay with me!” The tall boy whistled again. “There ain’t much to stay with me for—I ain’t got no ‘ome but a shake-down in a hattic. But I’ll try the father business with ye, Ikey, if ye wants me to.”

Ikey looked up through his tears, with a glimmering hope in his poor pinched little face.

“I’ll ‘elp ye with the papers,” he said—“I can run ever so fast, an’ ketch up the ge’mmen wot ain’t goin’ to buy no ‘Mails,’ but wen they looks at — me, they buys ‘em! I won’t be no trouble!”

“If I takes ye, ye’ll stop turnin’ on the tear-taps?”

Ikey coughed, choked, and emitted a stifled “Yes.”

“Right you are!” said the lanky boy—“Now you know me. Wot I sez, I doos; an’ now you’ve picked me out as a father to the fatherless, which is penny track readin’, you’ve got to do as I tells ye. The ‘Dook’s’ a man of his word, I can tell ye! Come along wi’ me.”

“Where to?” faltered Ikey.

“In there!” and the “Duke,” as the lanky boy called himself, pointed with a magisterial air to the big building confronting them, which to the frightened Ikey suggested itself as a kind of glorified jail or police court. “Come on, an’ ‘ave a smell o’ the food, even if ye can’t swaller it!”

He led the way. On the steps of the building he paused and turned round to his somewhat lagging little follower with a knowing wink.

“This is my club!” he said—“An’ the ‘ed steward knows as ‘ow the Dook’s pertikler!”

Ikey stumped wearily up the steps after him, but his little feet were tired, and his little body was weak, a state of things which the “Duke” perceived, and gave him a helping hand.

“Up ye comes!” he said, almost lifting the little fellow along—“We’ll ‘ave a sit down in ‘arf a minute.” And, here arriving in a spacious entrance hall, he took from the hand of a brisk attendant who stood at the foot of another flight of stairs, a pink slip of paper, on which was set forth the following tempting propositions to the hungry:

WHERE TO DINE!!!!
ALEXANDRA TRUST DINING-ROOMS
CITY ROAD

This Day—FRIDAY

Roast Ribs of Beef	...	...	...	...	...	2½d.
Roast Leg of Mutton	...	...	...	...	...	2½d.
Large Steak Pudding	...	...	...	...	...	3d.
Small do. do.	...	...	...	...	...	2d.
Stewed Steak	...	...	...	...	...	3d.
Hot Fried Fish	...	...	...	...	...	1d.
Chip Potatoes	...	...	...	...	...	1d.
All Vegetables	...	...	...	...	...	1d.
Yorkshire Pudding	...	...	...	...	...	½d.
Jam or Plum Roll	...	...	...	...	...	½d.

“‘Ere’s the menoo,” said the “Duke”—“Know what a menoo is? A program! Hall the winners! Set out in beautiful print as clear as a tombstone hepitaph. Wot’ll ye ‘ave, Ikey? Ribs o’ beef?”

Pot of Tea (freshly made)	1½d.	Cup of Tea	...	...	½d.
Roll and Butter (pure)	1d.	Cup of Coffee	...	...	½d.
Toasted Tea-Cake	1½d.	Cup of Cocoa	...	...	½d.
Two Rounds of Toast	1½d.	Rasher of Bacon	...	...	1½d.
Two Poached Eggs on Toast	3d.	Half Gammon Rasher	...	...	2½d.
Two Sardines on Toast	2d.	Salmon or Sardines	...	...	1d.
Eggs (fried or boiled) 3 for	2½d.	Jam or Marmalade	...	...	½d.
		Home-made Pastry	...	...	½d.

Ikey gasped. The poor little chap had not tasted meat for many days. “Wot is it?” he asked.

“You’re wot the play-hactors calls a sublime idgit,” declared the “Duke” with unctiousness—“Beef is beef, an’ ribs is ribs. But mebbe you’d like Large Steak Pudden? That’s threepence—the beef’s twopence ‘apenny. But I’ll stand the pudden, if so be as ye fancies it.”

Here Ikey suddenly began to cry again.

“There now!” And the “Duke” frowned warningly—“What about tear-taps? Well, never mind!” This, as the poor mite suddenly stretched out a pair of gaunt little arms which showed their flesh through his tattered coat sleeves, in such a fashion of appeal as would have touched the hardest heart. “Ye’re just worn out an’ wobbly like—here goes!”

And lifting the child in his arms, he mounted him easily on his shoulder, and carried him lightly up the flight of stairs to what is known at the “Alexandra Trust” as the Men’s Dining-Room. Though it was not yet one o’clock, this room was filling fast, and the “Duke,” pausing for a moment and paying something to a man who gave him certain slips of paper in exchange, made haste to secure seats at a corner of one of the numerous tables, where he set his self-imposed burden down. Ikey was bewildered, and a little faint. He could not quite make out where he was — and such an array of tempting food as was set out on a large circular counter confronting him, he had never seen except in shop windows against which he had often pressed his little cold nose and watering mouth, in the strained eagerness of physical longing. There was Jam Roll!—yes—suety pudding roll—positively oozing with jam!

He took a fancy to that at once, and made some inarticulate remark concerning it.

“Nonsense!” said the “Duke” with parental emphasis—“You ain’t goin’ to begin yer dinner with the last course! Jam roll indeed! Tell ye wot!—yd seems a bit finnick like—I’ll give ye some hot fried fish an’ chip potatoes. That’s fine! I’ll have some too. That’ll be tuppence each.”

“I ain’t got tuppence,” said Ikey.

“Who arskt ye for’t?” demanded the “Duke,”

“Ain’t I a ‘treatin’ of ye?”

Ikey’s pale lips parted in the thin ghost of a smile.

“I’ll love ye a lot!” he said, whisperingly. Whereat the “Duke” lifted him up and set him down again more comfortably on the bench they occupied. Then he grinned sheepishly.

“Love me a lot, will ye!” he said—“Lord, wot a kid it is! Fried fish, eh?”

Ikey nodded. The dining-room was warm, and he was beginning to feel comfortable.

“Sit there till I come back with the grub,” commanded the “Duke.”

Ikey obeyed, sitting very still. He could not, however, help looking about him, and vaguely wondering where all the men and boys came from. A great number had filed in even since he had arrived—and they were all intent on the one object—a good dinner. That they were going to have it too, was quite certain. He watched them; his earnest and wistful little face turning first in one direction, then in another. The clean, smart servers at the counter looked at him now and again, and whispered, and he fancied they were whispering about him. Perhaps they knew his mother was dead?—perhaps they saw he was a very lonely little creature

in a very crowded world? He could not tell. He was glad when he saw the long-legged "Duke" returning, carrying two plates very carefully—plates full of the most deliciously fried fish and equally delicious chip potatoes.

"'Ere we are, youngster," said the "Duke," cheerily—"Ef there's bones in these 'ere temptin' lookin' mossels, mind ye don't choke yer little self with 'em!"

With this warning he sat down, and was more interested in watching his small protégé enjoy the food than in eating it himself.

"Ye didn't notice me gettin' our tickets for this 'ere," he said—"I'm good for a whole tenpence—fivepence for myself and fivepence for you. This 'ere fried fish an' potatoes is on'ny tuppence—we've each got a whole threepence worth to come."

"What a lot!" said Ikey.

"Ain't it! An' ef yer gets proper through yer fish, we'll 'ave a jolly dish o' vegetables each. They doos 'em well 'ere. That'll be another penny. Then we'll finish with Jam Roll!"

"Will we?" and Ikey's eyes brightened.

"Av coorse we will! But Jam Roll's on'ny a 'apenny—dunno 'ow we'll make up to fivepence, blow'd if I do!"

He meditated—Ikey became profoundly interested.

"I'm a spendin' too much, that's a fact," said the "Duke" at last. "I might a' done it 'and-some for fourpence. But I tell ye wot—we'll 'ave a pot o' tea freshly made—that's three 'apence, an' we'll be reg'lar full!"

Ikey positively laughed—a little shrill laugh, not very merry to hear, and not at all child-like—still it was the first sign of delight he had given for many a weary day. They then both applied themselves to their food. Suddenly a tall man, wrapped in an overcoat lined with fur, strolled up to their end of the table, and bent a pair of keen blue eyes on the startled Ikey.

"Hullo!" he said—"Enjoying it?"

Ikey stared silently, first at the speaker (whom he privately considered a "toff"), and then at his plate. Did the "toff" know about the Jam Roll, and was he going to say there was no more left?

The "Duke" answered for him.

"I 'spect he is, sir," he said—"He's on'ny a kid, an' ain't used to dinner company."

The gentleman smiled.

"Is he your brother?"

"No, sir. I ain't got no fam'ly. His mother went parst last night, an' he's offered hisself to me as a sort o' son an' hair, which I wasn't wantin' none, but bound to do my best for 'im, bein' an orfing."

The gentleman laughed outright—then glanced him up and down.

"Do you mean to tell me that this child is no relation to you, and that you've adopted him?"

"That's it, sir! I knows him well—seein' we'se both sold newspapers together in the City for goin' on a year, but 'e's alius 'ad a mother to run 'ome to till last night."

"And now he has none," said the gentleman, thoughtfully—"Poor little man! And what's your name?"

"Jimmy Duke, sir. They calls me *the Duke* for common-like."

“They calls you the Duke for common-like,” echoed the gentleman, with a shrewd smile—“Well! They might do worse—they really might do worse!”

He walked away. Ikey, breathing very hard, pressed up close to his “ducal” friend.

“Is ‘e a goin’ to ‘ave a dinner ‘ere?”

“Lor’ love ye! Av coorse ‘e is! ‘E often dines ‘ere for company!”

“‘E’s a toff!” whispered Ikey, in tragic accents.

“Toff be blowed! ‘E’s one o’ the ge’mmun as ‘elpt to build this ‘ere ‘otel, an’ sure alive, if ‘e ain’t goin’ to get ‘is own grub in it, I’d like to know who is!”

Ikey was silent. He wondered why there was only one “toff” dining there that day. All the other “ge’mmun” were anything but “toffs.” They looked very hungry—and some of them looked sadder than even hunger could make them. The room was so crowded now that it seemed a perfect wilderness of faces—faces on which nature had unerringly written the history of many a struggle with poverty, many a sorrow, and many a sin, born not so much of wilful wish to do wrong, but of hard temptation and bitter suffering. Men of the roughest type were seated closely round the tables—yet not one jostled another purposely or indulged in any “horse-play.” There was a perpetual buzz of voices, yet no coarse language—and each man assisted his neighbour to pass the plates of food along with care that nothing should be spilt or broken. One thin old fellow, sitting at the same table with the “Duke” and Ikey, brought from the counter a cup of cocoa, and putting it down with hands that trembled nervously, took out a dirty newspaper parcel from his pocket, which he opened carefully, disclosing sundry scraps of broken meat, crusts of bread and cold potatoes.

“‘Ullo!” said the “Duke” good-humouredly, “That’s a fine dish you’ve got there! Wasn’t cooked in this ‘ere kitchen, I bet!”

The old man looked up and smiled feebly.

“No, it wasn’t. But I can’t spare more than a half-penny to-day for ‘extras’ like this!” And he looked at his steaming cup of cocoa tenderly.

“I see! And it’s a good ‘apenny worth, that cocoa is! You bet! I knows it!” And the “Duke” smacked his lips. “But as for yer roast an’ biled in that there bit o’ newspaper, I ain’t goin’ to compliment ye!”

The old man sighed a little.

“It’s as good as I often get,” he said, patiently; “I mustn’t complain. And it’s kind of the people here to let a man bring his own dinner in if he likes, and get something hot to wash it down with.”

“Yes, it’s mighty kind!” said the “Duke,”

“Though I calls it a reg’lar doin’ of the ‘stablishment! ‘Owsomever, ye’ve got the leave to do it, an’ ye’re one o’ those as does it. Mean to say ye can’t earn tuppence?”

“I’ve got to put by a copper or so for a bed,” said the old man—“And I’ve had an unlucky day.”

He looked, as he spoke, at I key, who was now feasting on the much-desired Jam Roll.

“I heard what you said to the gentleman just now,” he went on—“Are you goin’ to keep that little chap?”

At this Ikey lifted Up his head defiantly.—!

“No ‘e ain’t! I’m a’ goin’ to keep myself, an’ ‘im too when ‘e gets old.”

The “Duke” burst into a guffaw of laughter. “Ain’t ‘e a nipper!” he ejaculated—“Not gone sivin yet, an’ talkin’ about me gettin’ old! Mad j on Jam Roll ‘e be! Look at ‘is mouth, all stickin’ with it! We ain’t got no cambric blow-noses ‘ere, so I’ll ‘ave to wipe it on my coat sleeve.”

Which he did, with considerable pride, Ikey permitting his mouth to be somewhat fiercely rubbed in the cleansing process.

“I had two children—little boys—once,” said the old man, tremulously, taking a sip at his cocoa, “But they’re both dead.”

“Gone parst,” commented the “Duke.”

“Is that what you say? ‘Gone past?’”

“Well, av coorse! Wheer should they be goned to?” And the “Duke” waved his hand explanatorily. “When folks go down a turnin’ like for a bit an’ you don’t see ‘em no more an’ ain’t quite sure of their ‘ome adress in future, you Sez they’s gone parst. ‘Tain’t perlite to call ‘em dead.”

“That’s a pretty way of putting it.”

“Glad ye like it!” said the “Duke” graciously.

“How old are you?”

“Sixteen.”

“Sixteen! Only sixteen! All the world before you”—and the old man shook his head and laughed somewhat sadly—“All the world before you!”

The “Duke” gave him a suspicious glance.

“Now look ‘ee ‘ere, don’t go shakin’ that ‘ed o’ yours over yer broken victuals,” he said, severely—“Or ef ye do, I’ll take it as ‘ow ye’re makin’ tracks for a ‘sylum wheer they puts folks as gits a buzzin’ in the upper storey. All the world before me, indeed! I like that! Sellin’ ‘apenny papers ain’t a millionaire biz, you bet! Ikey’s in it along wi’ me, an’ we can’t say shares is at a premium!”

He laughed, and scraped the last remains of Jam Roll off his plate with exceeding heartiness. The old man, meanwhile, began to eat his poor “broken victuals,” Ikey watching him with grave interest.

“Is it nice?” the child asked.

“Nice?” broke in the irrepressible “Duke”—“I should think it was! Rather! It’s a R’yal gift, from the ‘ands of ‘is own R’yal Tghness’s flunkey at the gates o’ Buckin’am Palace! Nice! It’s just scrumptious! — pertikler the cold pertatis!”

The old man bore the jesting patiently — in fact he seemed rather to enjoy it, and when some of the other men round the table laughed, he joined in their laughter. But now the last, the very last scrap of the Jam Roll was finished, and the “Duke” with a brief sigh of regret over the departed good victuals, prepared to vacate his place at table.

“Must we go?” asked Ikey, plaintively.

“Av coorse we must! Didn’t think we was going to live ‘ere for good, did ye? Wish we was! But there’s others wantin’ seats, Ikey—an’ we must clear out.”

Ikey slipped down from the bench obediently, but he felt very tired and sleepy, and wished he might lie down on the floor. He whispered as much to the “Duke.”

“Lie down on the floor!” echoed that personage, aghast—“Wot! Arter such a feed as ye’ve ‘ad? Wants to sleep it off, I s’pose, like a reg’lar old ‘un. Well, this ain’t no nussin’ ‘ome—it’s the Alexandra Trust Dinin’ Rooms, and they ain’t goin’ in for no

baby cribs yet awhile. Ye'll 'ave to buck up an' come along wi' me—the fust speshuls'll be out directly, an' ye can 'elp to make a bit."

Ikey smiled, and his pinched face brightened, despite its pallor.

"All right!" he said, and he gave a vigorous stamp of his little feet, and shook himself together like a small terrier preparing for "sport"—"I 'spect the sleep'll go w'en I begins to run!"

"That it will!" affirmed the "Duke I'd like to see ye tryin' to sleep wi' a bundle of 'apenny speshuls under yer arm an' a few motor waggins comin' sharp round a corner!"

And guiding the little fellow carefully through the now dense crowd of customers in the diningrooms, he made for the door of exit. Suddenly a man placed himself in his way, holding a scrap of paper in his hand, which he glanced at before speaking.

"Is your name Jimmy Duke?" he asked.

The "Duke" at once straightened himself with an air of defiance.

"That's me!" he said, "Wot of it?"

"Are you the one they 'calls the Duke for common-like'?" the man proceeded, a slight smile moving the corners of his mouth under his neatly trimmed moustache.

"That's me again," replied the "Duke"—"An' I sez again—Wot of it?"

"Kindly follow me," said the man—"Someone wants to speak to you."

Ikey caught at his friend's coat pleadingly.

"You're to come too," said the man, looking down at the little white face compassionately enough—"Please step this way."

The "Duke" gave vent to a whistle, and stared about him bewilderedly.

"I say!" he whispered, hoarsely, "Wot game is this 'ere? I ain't done nothink—I've paid for wot I've ate."

The man smiled, and looked quite pleasant.

"Oh yes, that's all correct!" he said—"There's nothing wrong! It's only a gentleman wants to ask you a question."

"Arsk me a question!" The "Duke" repeated this in a stage aside to Ikey, whereat Ikey replied—

"Don't let 'im!"

They passed out of the crowd into a little passage, and from thence to a side-door which opened into a small private room, where their escort introduced them, saying briefly—"These are the boys you wanted, sir," and left them. Here, walking leisurely up and down, was the very "toff" who had spoken to them in the dining-rooms some twenty minutes previously. He was all alone, and the "Duke" recognising him, drew a long breath and knuckled his forehead extensively, while Ikey, holding fast to his protector's ragged coat, stared at him in mingled affright and appeal. For somehow, in the little room where they stood, the "toff" looked taller and more terrifying—moreover he had put on a pair of glasses through which his keen blue eyes seemed to pierce like gimlets—and though there was the very decided glimmer of a smile under his iron-grey moustache, Ikey was not observant enough to see this. His short experience of this world had proved to him that "toffs" generally were more often cruel than kind, and a foreboding of

something dreadful about to happen to his friend the "Duke" or to himself, caused his meagre little chest to swell, and his eyes to fill with tears.

"Hullo!" said the "Toff" quite gently. "Don't cry!"

"That's wot I tells 'im, sir," murmured the "Duke," apologetically—"E's alius a turnin' on the main, an' the supply don't ever seem to give out. P'raps you'll 'xcuse 'im, sir, seein' 'is mother's gone parst, an' 'e bin wantin' to lie down on the floor since 'is dinner."

"Poor wee lad!" said the gentleman, with the kindest Scottish emphasis and accentuation—"He's worn out, and fretting for his mother."

"That's it, sir," said the "Duke," grateful for the homely simplicity of this explanation, and knuckling his forehead again, while Ikey, his terrors somewhat subsiding, choked back a sob, and tried not to "turn on the main" any more. The "toff" paced up and down for a minute, apparently thinking—then suddenly taking the only chair in the room, sat down upon it.

"Come here, Mr the 'Duke!'" he commanded. The "Duke" obeyed, and approached, with Ikey still clinging to him.

"Look me straight in the face!"

Unhesitatingly the "Duke" raised a pair of honest eyes, faithful as the eyes of a dog, and fixed them upon his interlocutor. But the ordeal was a more trying one than he had imagined—for the eyes of the "toff" were like search-lights, plunging into all the holes and corners of his poor uncertain soul, and shedding a fire of examination into the darkest recesses of his conscience. Yet he never flinched—he bore the silent examination without a start or a fidget, though he was often wont to say afterwards—"the cold drops went a' tricklin' down my spine, as though someone 'ad got 'is umbreller drippin' over me. An' if I'd bin like the chap in the penny track readin' wot fell dead an' was carried out by the feet for tellin' of a lie, dead I'd a' bin, as dead as a door nail."

Presently the "toff's" glance relaxed, and he smiled quite genially, giving one or two almost facetious twirls to his moustache.

"Now Mr the *Duke*," he said—"How does your Grace make a living?"

"Sellin' the papers, sir," replied the "Duke," "It's 'ard work an' little pay, but it's better than nothin'."

"Where do you live?"

"Nowheres pertikler. I'm not takin' any on 'Ome sweet 'Ome yet,"—and the "Duke," relieved by the fact that his questioner had taken off his glasses and was polishing them, and that the searching blue eyes had for the moment released him from their spell, smiled broadly—"I lives in the streets all day an' sleeps in a hatic at night, an' that's wot this youngster'll 'ave to do ef 'e comes along wi' me."

"You are going to adopt this child, and teach him to earn his bread?" proceeded the gentleman, resuming his steadfast search-light gaze. "You don't mind the responsibility?"

"No, sir, I don't mind. We'll rub along somehow."

"You're not an Unemployed, then?" and the "toff" laughed.

"Not I, sir! There's alius somethin' wantin' doin', an' I'm alius ready an' willin' to do it."

"I see. Now, suppose,"—and here his questioner looked at him very hard—"Suppose I were to give you employment?"

The "Duke" uttered a curious sound—something between a laugh and a cry.

"I'd do my best, sir!" he faltered—"But I ain't got no one to speak for me—"

"You've no father or mother?"

"Never know'd 'em, sir. I'm what they calls a fondling."

And he lowered his eyes and pulled at his tattered vest nervously. There was a silence. Then the "toff" rose and put his hand on the "Duke's" shoulder.

"That's not your fault, my lad," he said, kindly. "That won't prevent my giving you a chance."

The "Duke" stared, tried to speak, but no words would come.

"Wot are ye goin' to do with 'im?" demanded Ikey, suddenly and querulously—"Ef ye takes 'im awy I'll git left!"

The "Duke" laughed, but brushed his hand across his eyes.

"No, ye won't, Ikey," he said—"I'll see t'ye—"

His voice broke and he turned his head away. The "toff" feigned not to notice him, and took a saunter up and down the room.

"E's cryin'!" shrilled Ikey, with piercing vehemence—"You've bin an' made 'im turn on the tear-taps!"

At this shrieking declaration the "toff's" gravity broke down altogether. He gave vent to a hearty laugh, his blue eyes twinkled with dancing sparkles of fun. The "Duke," shamefacedly wiping his eyes, laughed too.

"E's an orful nipper, sir!" he explained, in somewhat tremulous accents—"Orful, but meanin' no 'arm, please to 'xcuse 'im. 'E picks up jes' wot's said to 'im an' raps it out anyhow, but 'e ain't gone sivin yet, an' 'ope 'e aint offendin'."

"Not at all—not at all!" And the "toff's" face, lit up by humour and kindness, was a very pleasant study—"He's a quaint little chap—likely to make his way in the world. What's his name?"

"Michael Grady, sir, which don't want no placards to say 'e's Irish. 'Is father wor a caution—drunk as a lord from first o' Janewary to last o' December, an' was mussifully runn'd over by hacci-dent. They'd a pretty bit about it in the 'Star' as sed this pore man hexpired of 'is injuries quarter past four bein' runn'd over at three, but niver a word as to 'ow 'e was that blind drunk 'e couldn't see whether St. Paul's was a cathedral or a furniture van.' 'Is mother took in City waiters' washin' an' now bein' gone parst, 'er shutters is up for good. An' 'e bein' an orfing they calls 'im Ikey for short."

"As they call you the *Duke* for common!" said the "toff," facetiously—"Well! You, Mr the *Duke*, and you, Master Grady, may consider yourselves in my service. And if you are steady—if you behave well, and do the work you are told to do and stick to it, you will rise. Do you know what a *rise* means?"

"Yes, sir!—an' ever grateful an' ever obliged!" murmured the "Duke."

"But I'm bound to give notice to 'im wot trusts me to sell 'is newspapers. It wouldn't be fair to leave 'im in the lurch, like, would it, sir?"

"Of course not!"—and the "toff" smiled approval—'

"This is Friday—give your notice tonight—and if you can arrange it, come round to my offices on Monday morning. One of my men will meet you there, and show you what to do. But mind, I expect you to work your best, no matter what work it is. If you only get a floor to sweep, I want it swept thoroughly. You understand?"

"Yes, sir!"

“Work,” said the “toff,” swinging up and down the tiny room at an easy stride, and straightening his shoulders—“is the only thing that makes a man respected or respectable. Work”—and warming with his thoughts he now talked more to himself than to his youthful listeners—“is the only thing in earth or heaven that brings God’s blessing with it. Idlers are the curse of a nation—the workers are its rescue and safety. I don’t care what the work is, so long as it is work—real honest labour. I honour the man who digs the ground for a small wage quite as much as I honour the King who serves the people for a large one. What pride is there in being left heir to millions that one has not earned? What glory is there in a position that only comes by heritage? Every man should make his—own money and his own renown! The great thing is to begin at the very bottom of the ladder, and climb—climb—climb—to the very top!”

Unconsciously he raised his hand as he spoke, and the “Duke,” fascinated, gazed upon that uplifted hand as a kind of commander’s signal for him to begin in good earnest the battle of life. It was an unusually characteristic hand—and the “Duke” suddenly bethought him of a great personage who had once been pointed out to him as an Earl, and to whom he had sold an evening paper at the entrance to the Carlton Hotel. The Earl had given him sixpence, and had held out his hand for the change—and even so uninstructed a lad as the “Duke” had been struck by the common “thief’s hand” which distinguished that proud “descendant of a hundred kings.” The remembrance of its coarse flabby flesh and ugly shape now flashed through the “Duke’s” brain, as he contemplated the straight upraised palm of his new master, but he had no time to consider the incident more than for the passing of a second, as Ikey here created a diversion by giving vent not to tears, but to song: “Right up—ever so far!” he crooned, cheerfully, to a baby tune of his own—“Climb to the top! Straight over all the world an’ through the sky—up to the top—up to the very tip-top! We’ll find God there!”

The “toff” looked at him attentively.

“We’ll find God there, will we?” he echoed—“Well!—We hope so—we hope so!”

“Ef ‘e’s anywheres to be found up top you’ll find ‘im, sir!” said the “Duke,” emphatically—“Or ef ser be you don’t, none of us will!”

“Now see here, my lad,” said the “toff,” waiving aside this compliment, and reverting to business—“Understand me clearly. On Monday morning you will start work in my offices—at anything you are put to do—that is if your present employer will part with you at short notice. If not, give him his full time, and report here as to what day you will be ready to begin. A lodging will be found for you close by, which you can share with your little friend Ikey, and which you will pay for out of your weekly earnings. Ikey must go to school for a bit—and you’ll have to see to that. All’s plain sailing—but no favours shown. Do your duty and I’ll do mine. That’s all. By the way, is this the first time you’ve been to the ‘Trust?’”

“Lord love ye sir, no!” answered the “Duke” quickly—“It’s the fust time Ikey’s bin in, but meself, I dines an’ teas ‘ere every day. Wouldn’t know ‘ow to feed myself else.”

“Good! You’ve trusted the ‘Trust.’”

“That’s it, sir, and got good vally for it!”

“Well! You trusted a *Trust*— and perhaps a *Trust* will trust you!”—and the keen blue eyes of the speaker darkened with a certain earnest gravity—“That rests

entirely with yourself. Work there is for everyone—work always wanting to be done—and only those who do it well can hope to win reward. No *scamping*—no short hours—no grumbling! Mr the *Duke*, I have known what it is to be poor!—I have struggled, suffered and fought—but I have conquered! And how? By sticking to work, and keeping away from the drink! Two very simple rules, my lad!—but they are forces that when combined, make a lever to lift the world! Once I hadn't a friend—now perhaps I have too many of the *time-serving* sort—*friends* who, if I were to do as they would like me to do, drink, bet and gamble the hours away, and so lose all I have ever made, would desert me, one and all, like rats deserting a falling house. I know this well enough!—I know it is only my own Self that saves me. Your Self must make Yourself! No other man can make you! Remember that!

You've now got a chance in life—take it, and keep on the square!”

Another few minutes and the two boys found themselves again outside the “Alexandra Trust,” in the fog, which had grown denser and more blinding than ever. But to them, it looked like woven sunshine. The ugly crawling vans and omnibuses seemed like glorified chariots going to Paradise. And the “Duke” before starting to run hard with Ikey to get their bundle of “Speshuls” for the evening's sale, could not resist performing a dance with an elegant interlude of “double cut and shuffle” on the pavement, while he tossed his tattered cap in air.

“Hooray!” he cried—“Sing Hooray, Ikey!”

“Hooray!” shrieked Ikey, wildly.

“I'm goin' to make a fortin'! Hooray!”

“Goin' to make 'is fortin'! Hooray! An' mine! Hooray!” said Ikey.

“God bless the 'Trust!”

“Hooray!”

“God bless the man as 'elps to run it! Three cheers, Ikey!”

“Hip, 'ip, 'ip!—hooray!”

Taking each other by the hand they ran off together, and the fog enshrouded and swallowed them up. The twin lights of the “Alexandra Trust” winked after them almost knowingly, and shed a glare through the yellow haze as though desirous of following them whither they had gone. In a few seconds they had vanished. Where are they now? What is the end of the story? The end is not yet. It is only the beginning. And the way in which the rest of the tale might be told, is only known to one person—one who is a friend to many of the poor and sick and sorrowful in London City—one whom Ikey still affectionately calls “The Toff.”

