'You're a good little man, Jim,' said I, tenderly, 'I am glad you always come to Mass, and I hope you will always do so. Now, why did you come here to-night?'

He seemed surprised at my question, and hesitated a good deal before he said: 'I comes here every mornin' an' every night, sir.'

'And why, Jim?'

''Cause I says three "Hail Mary's" sir. Sal told me, if I'd say them every mornin' I'd get all my papers a-took, an' then I says them at night, to tell God an' the Blessed Virgin that I'se glad an' thankful for them gettin' the papers all a-took. I says them, sir, no matter if the papers ben't all a-gone, an' when they ain't all a-gone, then I gets a big deal more a-took the next day. It's Sal's time, sir, them's the chimes a-gone. I waits, sir, for them chimes, an' Sal waits, sir, an' if I don't come for the basket, then she knows what there's somethin' gone amiss, an' she comes a lookin' for me.'

CHAPTER II.

Jim's home was in one of those long, narrow, evil smelling alleys, which are only too numerous in all large cities, and only too well known, to require any detailed description. The house in which Sal Donovan found a shelter was in perfect harmony with its surroundings, being dilapidated, and from every point of view, frightfully miserable. The street door (having at some previous period of its existence lost the lower hinge, which was never replaced) leaned heavily to one side, as if mimicking the attitude of a drunken man reclining in the opposite doorway. The walls were damp and broken; the floors decaying, and covered with foulsome litter; while whole families were crowded into rooms in comparison with which the Black Hole of Calcutta, on the memorable occasion in which it figures in history, must have been a very Eden. The evil countenance of the Demon of Drink loomed forth at every step of the rheumatic stairway, and his polluting breath made foul the whole tenement atmosphere.

'Here's the gent. as I was a-talain' on, Sal,' cried out Jim, by way of introduction, darting before me into a room which, though very small, was comparatively tidy.

'Where is he, Jim, dear?' asked Sal, in a weak, trembling voice, 'Och! dear me, my poor eyes is agone, Jim, for I don't see him at all, God bless him.' But this was not a proof of faulty eyesight by any means, as the back of her head was towards the doorway, and I had not then entered the room.

'Here's him now, Sal,' cried Jim once more, and then turning to me, he said 'That's Sal, sir.'

Sal, who was mumbling her 'Rosary,' rose from the disused biscuit box on which she was seated, before the merest pretence of a fire, and made the stiffest, and most elaborate courtesy I ever beheld. She was a very short, stout woman, much bent by pain and age. Her face, deeply lined by care and time, was pleasing and attractive, and framed in a white full bordered cap, over which a neck shawl was worn hoodwise, and knotted under her chin. She wiped the top of the box, with the corner of her 'broad check' apron, and hoped I would be seated, an honor I declined, on the score of having but a short time to delay. I was pleased to find Sal, a thorough type of the genial, warm-hearted Irishwoman. The land of the Saxon had not dispoiled her of the traits of the Gael, as alas! it does too many of our exiles.

Without standing on ceremony, and as briefly as possible, I stated the nature of my visit. Sal was elated to know that I was favorably impressed by Jim, but no sooner did I hint that I meditated removing him from the streets, and placing him at school, than, in the forcible language of my countrymen, 'It was all up.' The very mention of school was a regular firebrand for Sal, but this was to be expected, knowing as we do, how closely the ideas of education and religion are associated in the Irish breast. 'An is't to school ve'd be after sendin' my Jim, sir?' asked Sal, placing her hands akimbo, and striking a dramatic attitude that bade defiance, fair and square, to rheumatism. 'We'l, no, thank ye. Jim ain't got much book learnin', to be sure, but thank God for it, he knows his catechism from front to back, an' his prayers, an' can spell the big letters in his prayer book o' a Sunday an' that's more nor some can do (she looked very suspiciously at my spectacle case peering out of my waistcoat pocket, when she said this). 'I'd like to see my Jim, sir, a-goin' to yer school, with an arm load a' books an' a head full of trash, as I sees them, ev'ry good mornin' that shines, as I sits on me box at the corner. I hadn't much o'learnin' meself, sir; but, thank God an' his Blessed Mother, this good night, I learned as much as kept me out o' harm's way, and earned an honest living. Me an' Jim is poor, sir, but there's many a one worser off nor we is, an' bad as we is, sure we might a been worser; so thanks be to God for all his kind mercies. We'll never want a meal's meat, nor He'll close one door only to open another; so I'm content as we is. Never mind Jim, though he ain't got yer fine learnin', he knows what God is, an' that's more nor all the stuff you's could cram down his throat would ever put into his head.'

Like the schoolboy in the story, the smile, which I vainly endeavored to conceal, burst at last; and I laughed outright; nor could I cease, though I saw Sal's glance travel significantly to a dangerous looking poker in the corner. Her mistake was a pardonable one, my appearance had deceived her. I have repeatedly been taken for a street preacher, a pedagogue, the head of some charity institution; but I have never yet met a stranger who imagined me to be what I really am, a fat, wealthy, very contented, charitable, easy-going, and I was going to say old gentleman, but why should I? We are told that a man is just as old as he feels, and I feel as if I were a young man of twenty, but I would not care to tell what the birth register says. At all events, I am a bachelor, and if old is required, parse it as an adjective understood, but do not say that it limits its application to me.

When the mists of prejudice and misunderstanding were cleared away, and Sal's better judgment shone out, we soon became friends, and chatted merrily. Friendship is soon formed with those who meet as strangers find they have many interests in common. We talked of the old country, old times, and old scenes, for we happened to hail from the same county. Then the conversation turned once more to Jim, and Sal adroitly dismissed him from the arena of chatter, by telling him 'to run down and see how Willie Leary's leg was doing.' 'I never says anything I knows about Jim when he's listenin', sir,' she explained to me, when Jim went down stairs, ''cause he's keen on the pickin' up.'

Jim's history, as it was known to Sal, was very short. Seven years before, on Christmas Eve night, a night which was bitterly cold, with the snow falling heavily,' as Sal was' toiling wearily homewards from her stall, she came upon a woman, sobbing piteously in an archway. She had a baby pressed closely to her breast, shielding it with the mother's love and devotion from the icy blast. Sal, true, warm-hearted Irish woman that she was, brought the poor woman to the shelter of her own little room. The woman, who said her name was Driscote, died a few hours later, with the priest at her bedside; murmuring with her latest breath her husband's name, and her gratitude. Her child was Jim, and his mother with her life's history slept her last dreamless sleep in the cemetery not far away.

'She was none of us ordinary folks,' concluded Sal. 'She was a lady, and a good one, for Father Cleary, God rest his soul, for it was himself that was the dear, good priest, said it himself; an' she was very young, sir, an' a lovely creature, too. The Christmas Bells was just a-ringin' when she died. I promised to be good to Jim, an' she smiled, an' kissed this old, hard hand of mine. I often wonder who she was, sir, but I suppose, I'll ne'er know more about her. Poor dear!' and Sal brushed away the tears from her wrinkled cheeks, with the corner of her apron.

'Say, Sal, is you a-goin' to let the candle a-waste down an' crack the bottle?' shouted Jim, as he returned to report on Willie Leary's leg. 'Blest if the whole candle ain't a-run to coffin shavins'. Who's a-goin' to die, Sal?'

Sal started to trim the candle, and I started for home, telling Sal that I would speak to Father M'Kernan, of St. Mary's, about Jim. Before I had reached my own door, I had gone a step further in my resolve. I made up my mind to adopt Jim, for I had no living relative, under the broad canopy of heaven.

CHAPTER III.

A week elapsed before the combined efforts of Father M'Kernan and myself overcame Sal's scruples, and even then she did not wholly give way with good grace, but left us with a distinct impression that there was much misgiving on her part. She was not the one, she repeatedly told us, to go contrary to God's will, Who had every day been good to her and hers, but as to Jim, she had her doubts as to his welfare when he was removed from her sight, and from her personal supervision. However, she did agree to consign Jim to my care, on the conditions that Jim should come to see her every Sunday, and that she would be at liberty to come to my house and make inquiries every time she pleased, which, 'barrin' them rimatics were agin' her