

A Complete Story

THE VIOLINIST AND HIS GREAT MASTERPIECE

(By Francis McGuinness, in the *Dublin Weekly Freeman*.)

"Listen, father! Who is that playing the violin so nicely?"

Father and daughter were walking along the street together, little Molly grasping her father's hand, and well-nigh running in the endeavor to keep up with his long steps. The streets were snow-bound, winter's carpet covering everything and turning the dark and sordid into the purest of white.

Through the frosty air came the sound of a violin, in sweet, plaintive melody, now sinking soft and low, and again rising and breaking into a volume of rich, sad sound. It was an old Irish air, one of those which search the heart and bring to the eye unaccustomed tears.

"Isn't it nice, dad? I wonder who it is?" Mr. Evans was himself wondering who the player was.

"It seems to be coming from the next street, dear. We shall see when we turn this corner."

They turned the corner, and Molly saw at once her violinist. He was little more than a child, standing in the middle of the street. His clothes were shabby, and his cheeks worn and thin. His hand trembled as it held the bow, and gave a tremolo to the notes. But the eye had barely time and power to grasp these details, so much did the ear claim all attention.

For one so young the performance was splendid. The lad could not have been more than eleven years old, but the feeling and expression shown were superb. Mr. Evans stopped to listen, and Molly with the greatest joy followed suit. When at length the music stopped, Mr. Evans went over to the child.

"Why are you playing here in the streets? Have you no one to look after you?"

The lad shook his head.

"I was staying with my father till yesterday, when he went away, telling the people where we were staying that I would have to look out for myself. And so I tried to earn my living this way."

Mr. Evans made up his mind with a quickness which surprised even himself. He was well-to-do, and a widower. Molly was only four when her mother died, and since then her father had devoted to her all his time and care. One more in the family would not make any difference, especially when that one was a genius, as Mr. Evans was fully persuaded the lad was.

"Would you like to come and live with me and my little daughter?" he asked.

The lad's eyes started, and then took an expression of incredulity.

"Live with you!" he faltered. "You really mean it?"

"Of course I do. Now come with me. I'll soon arrange everything. Come along, Molly."

Mr. Evans's expectations were completely realised. John Redfern, as the lad said he was called, fulfilled perfectly the early promise he had given. No expense had been spared on the part of his adopted parent; the best masters had been procured, and every opportunity given to him to improve his wonderful talent. Worthily he had responded, and after many weary days of hard work and continued practice, he was at last to make his first appearance.

There was a great deal of anxiety in Mr. Evans's house that day. Molly, now a bright maiden of thirteen, walked about, trying in vain to distract herself. She felt as if she wanted to talk to everyone she met about the great event of the evening, and whether John would make a great name for himself.

"You know, dad," she said, "I shall die of grief if John doesn't make a great hit."

"You die!" said her father, looking at the bright eyes and rosy laughing cheeks. "You look like dying!"

"I've said any amount of prayers to Our Lady," went

on Molly, "and I am going to say the Rosary just before we go, and I'm sure Our Lady will help us."

Mr. Evans smiled with pleasure at the fervent piety of the child, and from his own heart sent up a fervent prayer for John's success.

Evening came, and Molly and her father sat in the stalls. The building was packed with an eager, curious crowd, for the rumor had gone forth that John was something above the ordinary. When he appeared, a trifle white and nervous, Molly's heart beat fast with anxiety. At first he played one of those intricate pieces, in which the melody is well-nigh lost in the labyrinth of trills and runs, but its execution pleased the connoisseurs by the splendid technique shown.

Then, after the applause had died away, he began Gounod's "Ave Maria." As he played the first low, vibrating notes, a great hush fell upon the vast throng. The violin seemed to be a human voice, uttering in low, sad tones the misery of earth's children. Then the music rose and swelled forth breaking into passionate waves of melody which broke upon the vaulted roof and came surging back again into the hearts of the hearers. It was a living prayer, borne from earth on the wings of sound to the throne of the sweet Mother of God. It was no longer a mere human effort, but a song of angels.

Nunc et in hora mortis nostrae.

"Now and at the hour of our death." The notes thrilled the hearers. Was it man or angel who gave out those sounds of heavenly music? It was the heart prayer of a sinner, the pleading of a wanderer, the sobbing of a soul. As the last notes died away in the simple, pathetic "Amen," the great crowd sat still and intent. The last quivering vibration ceased. A moment's silence, then a movement of relief, a quick breath of emotion, and then a great roar of applause burst forth, and a thunder of voices seemed to make the very building rock and tremble.

John's success was complete. He was overwhelmed with congratulations, and he returned home with Molly and her father with a heart overflowing with joy and happiness. His future was now secure, and he would be able to repay Mr. Evans for his kindness. The next day he was besieged with offers. An American tour at royal prices was offered for his acceptance. The London houses were also eager to retain his services. Arrangements were made, and John Redfern was fully launched on the sea of the world.

Six years after John Redfern was standing in his room thinking upon the past. The room was luxuriously furnished, and gave evidence of the artistic taste of its occupant. Expensive little ornaments were to be found on every hand. Yet there was nothing vulgar, no offensive display of wealth, but a quiet air of comfort and prosperity seemed to pervade the apartment. John stood thinking upon the past six years.

At first everything had been splendid. He had created a furor wherever he went. The newspapers were full of him. The reporters exhausted all their stock of startling adjectives in describing his performance. Nor was his early life left unknown. Some journalist had, somehow or other, got hold of it, and the facts were soon in everyone's mouth. This in itself was enough to make him an attraction. All over the Continent his progress has been one continued triumph. He was persecuted by admirers and surrounded by new friends. But, unfortunately, prosperity had been his undoing. Removed from home influence and surrounded by strangers, he began to let things slip. First it was Sunday Mass. True, it was hard to get up on a Sunday morning after a fatiguing night's playing; but John's conscience smote him when he thought of the hours of hard work he had given without a murmur to his violin practice. Nothing was then too hard; but now everything was so different. With the loss of Mass other things went wrong, and so, as John Redfern stood thinking of the past, his thoughts were not of the pleasantest kind.

He had not seen Molly for over a year. She was now a bright young woman of nineteen. When he saw her last he knew that his former brotherly love for her had grown into something deeper and tenderer. But, with the remembrance of his failings he had hesitated to offer himself as a suitor for her hand, for he knew well that Molly had been grieved to the heart by his neglect of religion.