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A
GOURD
FIDDLE

GRACE MACGOWAN
COOKE



A GOURD FIDDLE



Frontispiece—A Gourd Fiddle

"IT WAS A FIDDLE, AND COULD BE PLAYED
UPON."

See p. 36

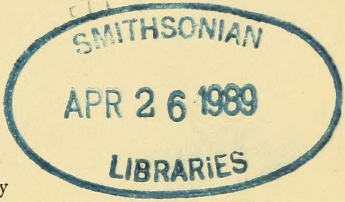
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Gourd Fiddle

By

Grace MacGowan Cooke



Illustrations by

E. Lynn Mudge

and

E. B. Miles

PHILADELPHIA

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To

ELIZABETH HEWITT WOOD



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ALONE
IN THE WORLD





A GOURD FIDDLE

CHAPTER I

ALONE IN THE WORLD

*All my folks is died an' lef' po' me.
(Lawd fergit me not—remember me
when the dark night come!)*

*An' where I'm a goin' I ain't see,
Fer I ain't no spot I can call my home,
An' I ain't no meat an' I ain't no
bread,*

*An' I ain't no where fer to lay my
head.*

*Oh, de ravens fed po' 'Ligey,
De ravens dey fed 'Ligey,
De ravens dey fed' Ligey—
But who gwine ter feed po' me?*

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HE was the sole, orphaned remainder of a long line of fiddlers. I do not know upon what instrument his remote ancestor may have played for some savage mid-African chief's wild revel or fantastic pagan rite; but from the time his people were brought, slaves, to this country, the men of the family had been masters of the violin, able to earn, from music-loving owners, special indulgence by the stroke of the bow, the cry of the strings.

They had belonged to the Fithian family ever since anybody could remember; and, grandfather, father, and son, from generation to generation, they had furnished the plantation fiddlers. Not only that, but they had been sent for on state occasions to play at the "great house," when there were guests and merrymakings.

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Little Orphy's grandfather, Adonis, had gone to Paris with his young master—that was in the time of Colonel Steptoe Fithian, and the family was very wealthy then—and had studied the violin under good teachers. It is true that he was never able to make much sense out of the little black dots and lines, the crotchets and quavers, and rests and ties, and many other things with long, hard names, which, he was told, went to make up the music in the “chune-books.” However, if his teacher would only play over the most difficult arias, Adonis could give them back to him like an echo, and rendered with a soft, pleasing coloring of his own.

But the time of valets and Parisian sojournings for the young Fithians was long past. Indeed, there had

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been no young Fithians these twenty years. The old, home-staying line, white and black, had declined together. For a long time there had been only the old mistress—very old—and Miss Patrice at the great house; and of the army of negroes who had borne the name, there was left to wait upon the two ladies only little Orpheus, without father or mother, kith or kin.

Mortgages had been, for years, eating up the big plantation, and the greedy, lawless Mississippi had been gnawing away its best fields, as a rude boy might take bites at a sugar-cake.

It seemed to Orphy that all the good things had happened before he was born and none were left for his times. He had lived his twelve years on the ruinous old plantation, and he had been Miss Patrice's house-boy for

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three years when the old mistress died.

Miss Patrice was his godmother. He had a fine, sweet, boy's soprano, and she taught him to sing the chants and anthems in the service of the little church where he was baptized.

She let him play on the old colonel's fine violin, and he was to have it for his own when he was twenty-one, or, if she were to die before that time, it was to be left to him in her will.

Miss Patrice was a good musician. To teach the child with her voice new airs for his violin, and, when he had learned them, to accompany him on her piano, was the solace of many lonely days to the gentle, faded little lady.

When she went away to a great Northern city, for the operation that

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was to save her life or end it, she parted from Orpheus very sadly.

He was to tend the house just as when she was there—to watch the hens' nests, sell all the eggs he could in the village, and give the money to Aunt Nutty, the cook.

She trusted him, too, to see that the little church altar had its Saturday supply of fresh flowers, a duty she had not failed to perform weekly for fifteen years; and she wished, if the operation should be unsuccessful, that he might sing "Lead, Kindly Light" at her funeral.

Orpheus considered that the worst which could happen to a boy had happened when Miss Patrice went away, and left him with nobody except grim, sour Aunty Nutty, who was not a Fithian negro at all, but only a hired cook. But when those strangers who



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"SHE LET HIM PLAY ON THE OLD COLONEL'S
FINE VIOLIN."

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held the various mortgages on the place had foreclosed them; when the house was full of curious, loud-talking people, examining, pricing, buying, and packing the precious old Fithian possessions, and there was nobody to speak for his ownership of the colonel's violin; when Miss Patrice was brought home, indeed, to lie in the Fithian burying-ground, and he had to see her hastily put by with a mere ordinary service, and nobody even knew of him, or that he was to have sung "Lead, Kindly Light" over the face of his last friend—then he knew—the poor, forlorn little shadow, slipping silently in to sit in a back pew—that truly the worst had come to him.

The great house, vacant and stripped, had been locked and boarded and nailed up at every possible en-

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trance by its new owners, since, in that impoverished village, there was nobody to rent such a mansion. Aunt Nutty, failing, for the same reason, to find a place, had gone ten miles up the river to stay with her son Garland.

Orpheus, without any relative in the world to whom he could go, felt that when your home was broken up, and every one who belonged to it was dead or gone away, when the earth had opened and swallowed all your present life, its belongings and its possibilities, why, you went away somewhere, quite far—and there was a place there for you.

The great, strong, muddy stream which runs swiftly past these little river towns and the big plantations, showing its superiority to and contempt for the puny plans of human-

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kind by every toss of its swirling, tawny mane, and the big boats it bears upward and downward upon its mighty breast, furnish the romance, the song and legend of the dwellers upon its banks, and weave themselves, finally, into most of the affairs of their lives.

So when Orphy first began to dream of going away, it was to the river, of course, that his thoughts turned.

All day he went about his task of collecting his small possessions, and bidding good-by to the different localities of the old place and that painfully new grave in the burial-plot, singing hopefully, almost joyously:

*“ Oh, de ‘ Clindyburg ’ am a mighty
fahn boat,
An’ a mighty fahn cap’n, too;*

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*'An' he sets up yendeh on de hay-
cane deck,*

An' keeps his eye on de crew.

*Oh, Loozy-anner, I's boun' ter leave
dis town;*

*Take my duds an' tote 'em on my
back, when de 'Clindyburg'
comes down.'*

Then, with his little bundle, he waited patiently, day and night, upon the village landing for the advent of a certain small, dingy stern-wheel boat upon which he had a friend in the person of a good-natured deck-hand, of whom he was sure he could beg a ride—up or down; it did not matter which, so it was away.

The big Mississippi River floating palaces never stop at Spartanburg. They churn the whole river into little waves that slap the levee insult-

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ingly as the great boats steam contemptuously past.

“Um-*umph!*” exclaimed Orpheus, regarding their magnificence through ecstatically narrowed eyes. “I betcher thass er fahn place whey them boats comes fum. I betcher iss boun’ ter be er fahn place whey they ’s a-goin’ at.”

“Whut dat ter you, how fahn dey is?” sneered Aunt Melie’s boy, who was always asleep on the levee, or kicking his idle heels against it, while he “feeshed” or watched the steamers. “Reck’n somebod’ gwine mek you er gif’ ouden some o’ dat ar fahnness?”

“I ’s ’bleege’ ter b’lieve,” murmured Orpheus, more in reflection than in reply, “dat whey dey comes fum an’ whey dey goes at, dey’s plenty wuyck foh er lakly house-boy,

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dest er-shinin' up de brasses an' 'pol-igisin' de silbeh."

And so it happened that, some days later, there walked in among the negro cabins of a big commercially managed plantation, thirty miles below Spartanburg, a timid and anxious-looking little yellow boy, asking in a shy and unaccustomed manner for "er jawb."

It was cotton-picking time, when everything that could work was pressed into service. There were no questions as to his qualifications and antecedents. He was asked if he could pick cotton; he answered that he "reck'ned so,"—he "nev' tried,"—received a basket, and was sent with a gang into the field.

Cotton-picking is hard, back-breaking work, and Orpheus had been literally, as the negro phrase runs,



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“‘IT 'S A FAHN PLACE WHERE DEM BOATS •
COMES FROM.’”

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“raised a pet.” He had never labored all day in the burning sun, slept in a hut on a pallet, and fared upon corn-pone, side-meat, and the greens called collards. He had never lived or associated with common negroes—field-hands.

The gibes of the rough, coarse, cotton-picking boys at his slowness and incompetence angered him. He thought how they would not be permitted to touch with their awkward horny hands the work he could do so skilfully; and it was only the diplomacy of that blood which is inferior and has been enslaved that made him remain silent when they laughed at him, and stick doggedly to his work.

He found some relief in turning his back upon his detractors and muttering to himself: “Miss Patrice ’ould n’ had none sich ez you gap-mouf,

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splay-foot; tah-baby, fiel'-han' nig-gahs foh a house-boy. She 'ould n' 'a' had one o' you in huh dahnin'-room. She 'ould n' 'a' let you step yo' foot on huh po'ch."

One morning Uncle Mose, who was picking in the row next Orpheus, asked him if he had seen the visitor at the great house.

Orphy had noticed him,—a slender, clean-shaven young man with glasses and rather long hair, going about among the negroes up at the cabins, asking them some questions and writing their answers down in a little book he carried,—and Orphy said so.

Uncle Mose was old and garrulous, fonder of talking than of working. "He 's er-gittin' up er bain," he said, leaning on his basket.

"Er whut?" queried Orphy, absently, picking away industriously.

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“ W’y, er bain, ter play music,” replied Uncle Mose. “ He got ’im up one hyer las’ ye’r, an’ tuck hit ter de Worl’s Fa’r.”

At the word “ music ” Orphy was all alert. “ Boys ’at e’d play de fiddle?” he asked anxiously.

“ Er-r-r-uh-h!” answered Uncle Mose, rather contemptuously, “ singin’ niggahs, an’ banjer-pickin’ niggahs, an’ fiddlin’ niggahs, an’ whut nut. I don’t have no truck wid sich trash mos’ly.”

“ Did he take ’em somewhuz on de big boat?” asked Orphy, breathlessly.

Uncle Mose brightened at his interest.

“ Well, yas,” he admitted, mollified; “ he tuck ’em, an’ he gun ’em good wagers whilst dey ’s wid ’im— an’ dey’ rashions.”

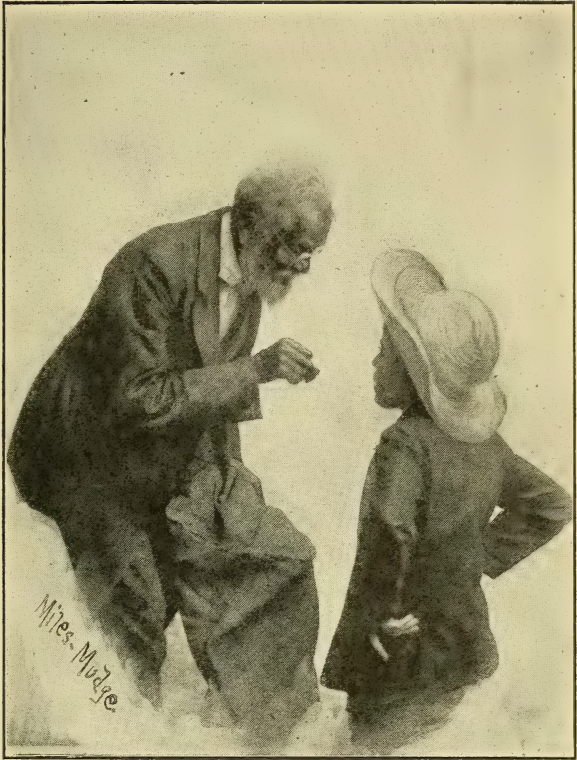
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“ Is he gittin’ mo’ now t’ take on de boat ? ”

“ Yas, ” answered Uncle Mose, with a discouraged and discouraging shake of the head ; “ but I boun’ y’ he don’ tek a-minny dish yer time. Boys ez no ’count now. W’y, in my day an’ time ”—and he embarked upon a long story which lasted to the end of that row and turned the next.

But Orphy heard none of it ; his head was too full to allow any new ideas to come in by way of his ears. Somebody wanted boys that played the fiddle—some white person who would take them away and give them a chance to live “ like folks. ” Oh, if he only had the colonel’s violin !

He fancied himself, washed clean and with his hair neatly combed as he had been taught, making his bow as he used to do, tucking the colonel’s



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“ ‘BOYS EZ NO 'COUNT NOW.’ ”



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violin under his chin, playing his very best, and being found acceptable.

For hours that night his tired little body tossed from side to side of his uncomfortable pallet among the snoring field-hands, and his mind ran the gamut of every scheme or plan by which he might get a violin to play in the band, for that he must get the violin in order to join the band he never thought to doubt.

No money had been offered him, and he was too ignorant of such matters to know that his wages, such as they were, waited for him at the office. He had not a friend on the plantation to whom he felt he could go. Indeed, his gentlemanly ways, and evident shrinking from the coarser features of this life, had singled him out as an object of bullying

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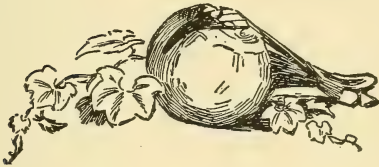
by the worse element of his fellow-workers.

Toward morning a soothing thought dropped down upon his worry, and sent him off contentedly to sleep. He remembered a curious-looking object which used to hang upon the wall of the cabin at home. It was a fiddle, and it could be played upon. His father had made it out of a gourd.

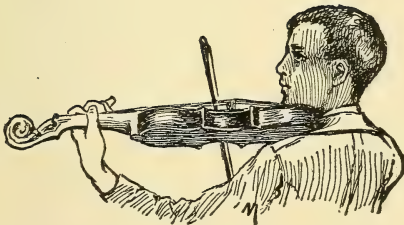
It was the first instrument he was allowed to play, and he knew its every peg and joint, and just how the stretched sheepskin was held over the front, and the well-seasoned bit of bois d'arc or bow-wood let into the neck. Oh, he was sure he could make one like it, if Aunt Cindy, the laundress, would give him one of her big soap-gourds, and somebody would let him have the skin, and somebody else lend him a bow and strings, for he had

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a sharp knife, and there was plenty of
bois d'arc down near the swamp! And
on this slender footing of hope he fell
happily asleep.



TRIED AND NOT
FOUND WANTING



CHAPTER II

TRIED—AND NOT FOUND WANTING

*I done make her out of an old soap
go'd,*

(Oh, my fiddle dat sing so sweet!)

*Ef I goes hongry, an' my coat's to'ed,
She sing to me ridin' up high on de
load,*

*She sing to me drivin' de cows down
de road,*

*An' de chunes puts a hop-hop-hop-
pin' in my feet.*

THINGS looked much more gloomy in the morning. Aunt Cindy was one of the church-going negroes who considered fiddling and dancing deadly sins. The thought of

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asking for one of her cherished soap-gourds to make into a fiddle sent chills down Orphy's back.

Big Mitch, the plantation fiddler, was the only one who had strings or bow, and his eldest boy, Little Mitch (nearly six feet tall, and head and shoulders above his wizened black father), was one of Orphy's chief enemies and tormentors. But, in the face of it all, the boy persisted.

"Yaller boy," said Aunt Cindy, accusingly, when he humbly pleaded for the gourd, and stated for what use it was wanted, "how you luhn ter play de fiddle?"

Orphy mumbled something, in a conciliatory tone, about "allers knowed—pappy showed me, an' Miss Patrice she teached me."

"Don'y' try wuk off none dat talk on me," snorted Aunt Cindy, con-

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temptuously. "Y' pappy! Y' Miss P'trice! I knows how no 'count nig-gah trash luhns de fiddle,—an' you knows, too,—s'posin' y' really kin play hit."

"How does dey l'arn?" said Orpheus, with very round eyes.

"Dar, now," replied Aunt Cindy, expanding into a mollified grin, "I knowed li'l' boy lak you had n' been er-mixin' an' er-mommuxin' wid no sich—I knowed y' could n' play none. W'y, honey, dey jes *practyzez* on er Sunday,—on de good Lawd's day, w'en He say nobod' sha'n' wuk,—an' de Ol' Boy whuls in an' he'ps 'em. Yas! 'S trufe! 'N' ef he don' come de fus' time, er-tryin' ter show 'em de chunes, an' de quirly-gigs, dey crosses dey foots (dat 's a *shore* black chawm) an' scrapes de bow er few, an he comes er-floppin'!"

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Orphy's evident horror over these statements was exceedingly flattering to the old woman, who was coming to expect that her wisdom would be laughed at by the rising generation.

"Dar, now," she said, "go 'long, an' don' try tellin' me sich tales 'bout mekin' fiddles, an' playin' fiddles. I gwine give y' de bes' gode I got, 'ca'se you's a nice li'l' gemman ter he'p me w'en I axes y'." And she did.

Orpheus worked on his fiddle at night, after the picking was over, leaving himself scarcely time to eat or sleep. He cut away the front of his gourd with the greatest care, fearing to crack the frail shell and spoil the tone of his instrument.

Meantime he had snared a rabbit, tried to cure its skin, found it too tender, and been reduced to trading his one silk handkerchief to Yellow



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"HE CUT AWAY THE FRONT OF HIS GOURD."

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Bob, the plantation butcher, for a bit of soft-tanned sheepskin to stretch over the opening.

The bois d'arc was found, neck and pegs shaped and in place, and he had come to the despairing point where he was ready for the strings and bow, when the foreman asked him kindly, one evening, if he knew that he could get money, or an order on the store, for the wages due him above his board.

He found that the store kept strings, and the storekeeper was willing to order a bow for him. It seemed no hardship to Orphy to do without the clothing he needed for the sake of these things he longed for.

When the curious, mandolin-shaped instrument was complete, when he had, with infinite patience and skill, brought the strings into tune,

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drawn his bow across them, and heard the tunes answer his call,—somewhat queer and “throaty,” but real tunes,—such bliss rolled over Orphy’s soul as nobody who merely *buys* a violin will ever know.

In the ardors of his work he had almost forgotten the object of it. He had been so long getting ready that the young man had made what he called his first trial, and had gone on now to another plantation, some miles below, before Orphy’s home-made fiddle was done.

They said he was coming back, as he had done the year before, for a final trial, and to take away with him the boys whom he selected.

Orphy did n’t believe he was coming again. Little Mitch said so, but then, Little Mitch always had things wrong. And Orphy scarcely cared

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whether he came or not. He had little hope of acceptance. So much fun had been made of his plan of fiddle-building that he was growing very doubtful about showing the fiddle to anybody, and the joy of its companionship was so great as to dwarf any minor misfortunes.

He was very shy of subjecting his new and dear companion to the indignity of being laughed at. "Yo' des lak ol' mis' use ter say 'bout Miss Patrice, honey," he would whisper, as he laid his chin lovingly against the sheepskin front; "y' ain' rightly purty, but you 's *mighty* sweet."

When his one holiday came, he usually carried his treasure, carefully wrapped, to a little grove down near the swamp, where people seldom passed, because it had the reputation of being "snaky." There, perched

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in the crotch of a water-oak, he would croon to his fiddle, and his fiddle would answer in familiar accents, all the long, warm Sunday afternoons. "Ain' no snek gwine tek de trubbl' climbin' atter sich er bone ez me!" he would chuckle gleefully, as he settled himself for hours of uninterrupted enjoyment.

But one day some of the more friendly boys surprised him there, and while he was proudly playing at their request, Little Mitch, his tall form decked in a suit of Sunday clothes, and with shoes on his big feet, happened past.

His appearance of astonishment at the fiddle and the fiddler was so natural that no one would have guessed that one of his friends, who knew he was "layin' fer dat yaller boy," had run to call him.

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“Whut y’ got dar?” he called out, as he came in sight.

“Fiddle,” replied Orphy, ceasing to play.

“Fiddle?”—drawing nearer, and reaching out his hand for the instrument. “Look ter me consid’ble lak er soap-gode.”

Orphy scrambled to the ground, and held his beloved fiddle behind him.

“Le’ me see her,” said his tormentor, sternly. Orphy retreated, and held the fiddle, ready for flight or fight at the slightest demonstration threatening it. He had been tenderly brought up, and had never been in a fight in his life, but at this danger to his fiddle, he felt something rising in his heart which entirely overshadowed his natural fear of Little Mitch.

But Mitch made no warlike demon-

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stration whatever. Instead, he threw himself back with a roar of laughter which made poor Orphy's ears tingle.

“Whoopee!” he howled. “Looky dat, now! Dat w'at dish yer boy name er fiddle. Oh, my lan'! 'F dass put un 'neath er daw-step f'r er hoodoo, hit 'd put er change on de bigges' man in Bayou pa'ish ”—and so on with uncouth grimaces and bellows of mirth, till Orphy, consumed with mortification, began wrapping up his pet for departure.

As his victim seemed about to escape, Mitch stopped short in the middle of a guffaw. “Mek 'er play,” he commanded.

Sullenly, and on the verge of tears, of which he was desperately ashamed, Orphy complied. At the first sound Mitch fell, apparently, into a great state of astonishment.

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“Gre’t day in de mawnin’!” he cried in pretended surprise. “Dish yer boy got er po’ li’l’ cat fas’n’ up in dat ar gode!”

Orphy lowered his fiddle angrily, and began again to wrap it up; but Mitch had picked up a stone.

“Po’ li’l’ cat,” he said advancing. “Kitty, kitty, kitty! I gwine bus’ dat gode an’ let de po’ li’l’ cat out.”

At the word poor Orphy leaped as though stung. Dropping his fiddle behind him, he sprang blindly at Little Mitch, and, using his bare hands, fought with such passion and fury as he had never known before.

Little Mitch was, after all, only a big, cowardly bully, and resistance was the last thing he expected. The stone dropped, grazing his own shin, and bringing a yap of pain, and he turned his entire attention to ridding

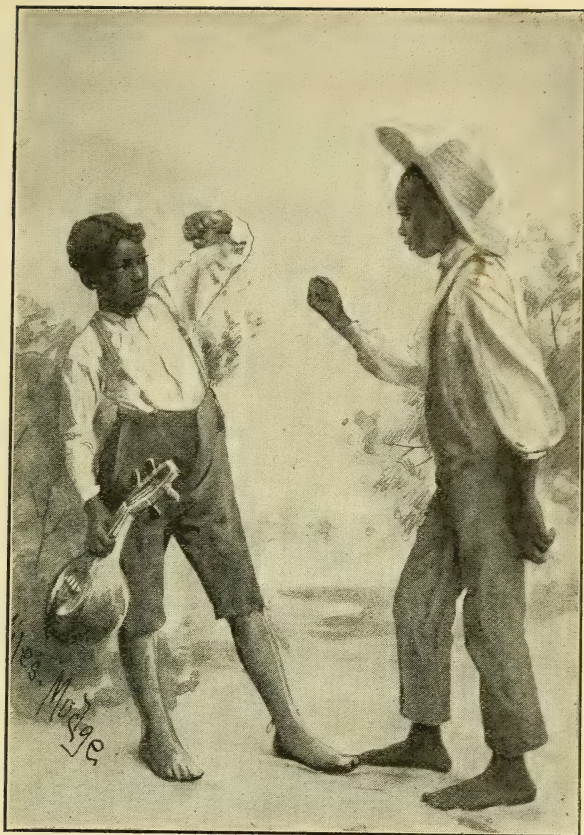
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himself of his small assailant, who seemed, like an angry cat, all teeth and claws.

The next thing Orphy knew, he was sitting on the ground, somewhat jarred and shaken, but otherwise unhurt, holding his beloved fiddle; and Little Mitch, at an extremely respectful distance, was wiping blood from his face on the cuff of his shirt, and muttering, "Nee' n' ter mek sich er fuss 'bout er joke! Nobod' ain' gwine troubl' you an' y' ol' gode fiddle."

After that Orphy knew that his fiddle was marked for destruction. He hid it during the daytime, when he was at his picking, with all the cunning of which he was master, and slept with it clutched fast every night.

The night the young man with the glasses—who had returned in spite of the fact that Little Mitch had said he



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“‘I GWINE BUS’ DAT GODE.’”

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would, and whose name, as Orphy had learned, was Professor Josef Blum—gathered the boys in the big shed to make a final examination and choice, Orphy made himself as neat as possible, and took his fiddle in his hand with many misgivings.

Since the fight, it and its owner had become, mainly through Little Mitch's agency, objects of much ridicule on the plantation, and Orphy shrank sensitively from taking it where it would excite further contempt.

Yet there was always a chance, and he tuned it and brushed it free from dust, polishing its bulging sides till they shone again.

As he neared the open, lighted doorway of the big shed, he caught sight of Little Mitch within, and his heart failed him.

Little Mitch was one of those whom

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Uncle Mose called the "banjer-pickin' niggahs." His father had vainly tried to teach him the violin; but he had a smooth, powerful bass voice, which it was hoped would recommend him.

The thought of taking his poor fiddle in to face Mitch's scornful laughter, and the possible amusement and derision of the white people, was too much for Orphy. He looked about for a hiding-place, and, laying the fiddle in behind some cotton-baskets by the shed wall, tucked the old cloth over it as a mother would tuck the covers over a little child, whispering to it: "I ain' gwine tek you in dar ter be made fun er. Nev' you min', honey; *I* loves you, ef nobod' else don'!"

When in his examination Professor Blum came to Orpheus, he put his

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large white hand under the boy's chin, and turned the eager, plaintive little yellow face up to the light. "Well, young man," he said, in his pleasant voice, with its slight foreign accent, "what can you do?"

"I c'n sing er right fa'r soprano, suh," answered Orphy, modestly.

"What 's that?" said the professor, struck by the boy's use of the proper and technical word.

But there came a snicker from the bench where Little Mitch sat among those culled out for a second trial, and Mitch, overblown with a sense of importance at being among the chosen, called out:

"He play de fiddle. He got one whut he brung erlong an' lef' outside."

"Is that so?" said the professor.
"Why don't you bring it in?"

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“Yas,” breathed Orphy, shifting from one foot to the other in an agony of embarrassment; “but I heap rutheh try ter sing foh y’, suh. Hit ain’ rightly er fiddle. Hit ’s er—hit ’s jes er—”

“Hit ’s er ol’ gode fiddle,” supplemented Mitch, in malicious enjoyment of his misery.

“A goat fiddle?” queried the young professor. “And what is that?”

At the roar of laughter which shook the benches on which the negroes sat, and even found an echo among the white folks from the great house, who had come down to see the fun, and were curiously watching this little scene, Orphy wished the earth might open for him.

“Hit ’s er gode fiddle,” he said faintly.

“A goad fiddle?” asked the puzzled

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professor, thinking of those long sticks used to prod oxen. "Go and get it, and play for us, that we may see what it is."

Orphy looked appealingly around the room. Was there no help? His glance fell upon Little Mitch, leering triumphantly, and the hot tears of mortification dried in his eyes.

He would show them, he thought, that he was a Fithian, that he had had better raising than these corn-field darkies. It was no sin to make a fiddle for yourself out of a gourd—if you could not do any better. He turned and marched out of the room like a soldier, looking neither to the right nor to the left.

But once outside, with the fiddle in his hands, the temptation not to return was strong. The professor, he could see through the window, was

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busy with another boy. Should he go back to be laughed at by everybody there?

Nobody who cannot remember it can realize how agonizing to a child is the thought of being an object of universal ridicule.

The longing to run away into the cool, friendly dark, just to take his despised fiddle and run on and on till he reached the river, and could go away to a new place, was hardly to be resisted.

But he conquered it. Fiddle in hand, he returned as he had gone, without looking at any one, and so preoccupied with the effort he was making that he failed to see the professor's outstretched hand or to hear his request to see the instrument.

Tucking its bulge into the angle of his shoulder, he tuned it, and began

A Gourd Fiddle

upon the odd, uncertain quavers of
“ Shortening-bread.”

Once he played the quaint little melody through without variation; then again, with little turns and embellishments of his own worked upon it; then, the third time through, he added his fresh young voice:

“ *I so glad de ol' hog dead—*

*Mammy gwine mek some shawt-
nin'-bread.*

Oh, mammy's baby loves shawtnin',

*Oh, mammy's baby loves shawt-
nin'-bread.”*

When he had finished, the professor again stretched out his hand, and Orphy put the fiddle in it.

“ Well,” said the professor, “ this is great! Where did you get it? Why, it 's home-made! Who made it?”

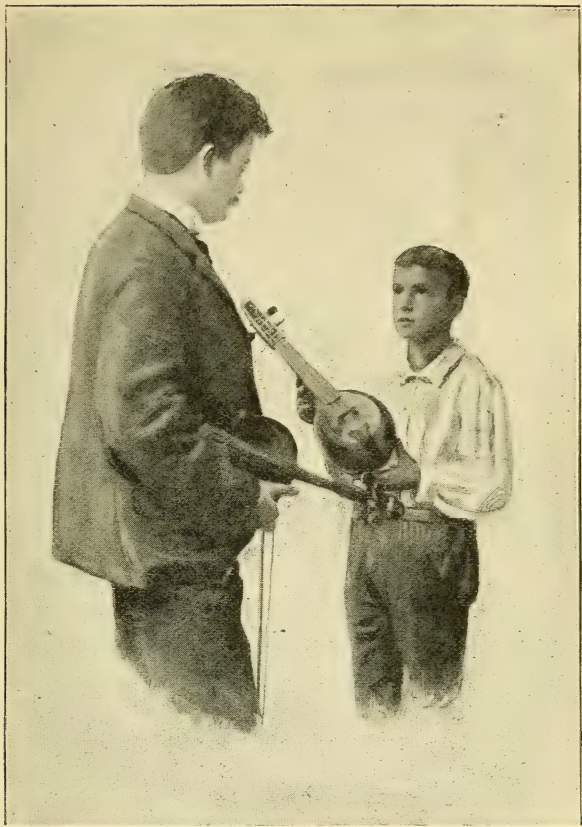
A Gourd Fiddle

“ I did,” said Orphy, relieved, but still somewhat apprehensive of the inevitable laugh he thought must follow the confession.

“ Oh, no,” said the professor, “ how could you have made it ? Who showed you how ? ”

“ Nobod’ did n’,” said Orphy. “ My paw had one like hit ; he made hit—er my gran’paw did, I dunno which. Hit ’s de fus’ kin’ er fiddle I played on ; but I c’n play er heap bet-tah on dat kin’,” looking wistfully at the table, where he now saw the professor’s violin lying.

“ I don’t want you to play better,” exclaimed the professor, enthusiastically. “ I want you to play this. Don’t you see what a card this will be for me ? ” he asked, turning to Colonel Murchison, the proprietor of the plantation. “ Here is the planta-



A Gourd Fiddle.

“‘ WHY, IT 'S HOME-MADE! WHO MADE IT?’ ”

A Gourd Fiddle

tion musician and the plantation instrument! It will be the greatest attraction of my chorus in England and Germany. I will make him a soloist," he was going on enthusiastically, when Colonel Murchison's energetic signals caused him to halt and consult that gentleman aside for several minutes. During their conversation one of the young ladies from the great house handed Orpheus the violin, with an encouraging word, and he began an anthem of Bach's which he had often played in the little church at home.

The professor wheeled upon him at the sound. "What 's this?" he said. "Classic music? Can you read notes?"

"No, suh. Dass er chune Miss Patrice teachted me faw ter play in de chu'ch. I knows er heap er dem

A Gourd Fiddle

chunes. She use ter play 'em on huh pianny, er sing 'em, 'n' I ketch 'em." And tears stood in his eyes at the remembrance of those good days.

"See here," said the professor, speaking evidently upon a sudden impulse, and with a quick, piercing look at the boy's face. "The colonel, here, says I ought not to tell you that you 'll be valuable to me—you know what that word 'valuable' means, don't you?"

Orphy nodded a bewildered nod.

"Well, he says if I give you an idea that I want you pretty bad, you 'll be running off and trying to hire to some one else. Will you?"

The professor had judged his boy aright. Tears, of which he was too happy to be ashamed, ran down Orphy's cheeks as he answered stoutly: "No, suh. Dey ain' none er de Fith-

A Gourd Fiddle

ians tricky dat way in tradin'! I 's mighty glad dat somebod' do want me."

The young professor heard the homesick boy's heart speak in that last sentence, and he patted him kindly on the shoulder.

"Well, now," he said, "that 's all right. Somebody wants you now. You sha'n't lose by it. I 'll pay you more than I can afford to pay such boys as those"—with a not too flattering wave of his hand toward the bench where Little Mitch and his fellows sat, open-mouthed and astounded. "I can pay you more, because you 're worth more."

"Yes, suh," said Orphy, respectfully; "I 'll try ter be."

It was the one fling he permitted himself at his dumfounded and vanquished adversaries; and, delivered

A Gourd Fiddle

with demure meekness, it told in a little snicker from the benches where their elders sat, and a smile on the faces of the "white folks."

"You see," said the professor to his host, when he was leaving, some days later, and Orphy, new dressed from top to toe, the happy possessor of a violin finer even than the colonel's, was going with him, out into a life bright with possibilities—"you see, nobody with a heart in him could cheat that little chap. He's so faithful and so trusting, and he tries so hard to please."

"Certainly," said the colonel, "you ought to give him what is justly due him; but I know negro nature better than you; and I say, better not make too much of him."

"Well," said the professor, seriously, as was his way, "I can afford

A Gourd Fiddle

to give him enough to pay good teachers to carry on his musical education, and to let him lay by a little, month by month, to give him his start when he is a man. There 's no telling what he may attain. I find he is a hereditary musician; and, for my part, I had rather come of a musical line than a noble line."

The colonel smiled indulgently. "He 'll sell you out to the first man who offers him more," he said.

"That he never will," replied the professor; "and as for keeping him in the dark about what he is worth to me, I could n't do it, if I would. He 's bound to take well abroad, and he 's bound to know it; and with such a boy I 'll take my chances on the result."

Little Mitch had finally to be dropped from the chorus, despite his

A Gourd Fiddle

good voice. He proved too thick-headed to take any instruction.

As the boys waited on the landing—Orphy pinching himself surreptitiously now and then to be sure it was not an all-too-blissful dream—for the big boat which was to take them all to “Noo ’Leans,” they could see Little Mitch in the cotton-field below, his tall form bent over, as he pretended to be too busy picking to notice them.

Out of the abundance of his joy and satisfaction Orphy found time to be sorry for him.

“ ’Pears lak I jes’ could n’ go back ter dat ar,” he muttered reflectively. “ Well, suh! I reck’n hit’ about all he ’s fitten foh.”

HER
MAJESTY



CHAPTER III

HER MAJESTY

*Let 's play you 're queen an' I am a
slave*

(It won't be reely an' true);

*But don't you stamp, an' don't you
rave,*

*Fer I ain't very big, an' I ain't very
brave,*

An' you 'll get me scared if you do.

THE voyage in the great ship, the novel surroundings, the bare fact that he had neat, whole clothing, and was not only allowed but desired and expected to wash and be clean, made a little heaven about Orphy.

And to the man who had brought

'A Gourd Fiddle

him all this, who opened before him the upward path, the faithful little soul offered an ever-growing devotion. He not only put the professor's name first in his daily prayer, but he added an unspoken and hourly entreaty that something might happen, some circumstance arise, by which he could show his gratitude. To be of exceptional use to his benefactor, to give back a tithe of what he had received, this was Orphy's dream; and such dreams as that always come true—they bring their own fulfillment.

It was when Orphy had been three months with the professor, and the band was in London, that an opportunity presented itself to prove his worth.

These three months had been a time of wearing labor to the professor and the boys, but to Orpheus a season of

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pure delight; for, even on ship-board, the individual lessons and *ensemble* training began. To go back to daily music-lessons was, to this humble but ardent little dusky disciple, like returning to a lost and well-beloved home.

Now, a concert or two had been given at one of the London music-halls, but the professor had signed his organization for a continental tour, and their London season was to come later. During the voyage over, the professor had made the acquaintance of an official high in the Queen's service; and this gentleman had promised that before the company left London it should have the opportunity of an audience with Queen Victoria. This, it must be understood, would be very valuable to the professor's enterprise. One often sees some adver-

A Gourd Fiddle

tisement in which it is stated that this or that singer or musical troupe has sung or played before one or another of Europe's royalties. Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, was extremely fond of music, an excellent judge of what is best in it, and her endorsement made any troupe or singer more popular.

Orphy was often at the professor's side, and when he heard these plans about playing before the great Queen and Empress, his simple soul was dismayed. He imagined her as at least ten feet tall; a very fierce lady, who carried a scepter with a knob on the end, which might be handily used to whack small boys who sharped or flatted a note in their playing.

However, he fully understood the importance of this matter to his beloved professor, and he was resolved

A Gourd Fiddle

that, even if the royal lady should breathe fire and smoke at him, he would, for life or death, do his best for the good friend who had done all for him.

It was a charming May afternoon; the long English twilight was creeping on as the professor, with his score of boys arranged upon an extended seat behind him, argued with one of the Queen's household in a corridor of Buckingham Palace. They had come upon appointment with the professor's friend, the General, but in some way the General's message had miscarried, and he himself was not present.

“ Beg pardon, my good sir. It is impossible. I am infinitely sorry, my dear professor, but His Lordship, the General, is not here; and in his absence I cannot undertake to bring this

A Gourd Fiddle

matter to the Queen's notice. You might wait—why yes, certainly, you should wait, of course. Very interesting, I am sure. No doubt the Queen will hear you, if it can be brought to her notice!" And the tall, fair man turned and looked curiously at the twenty boys through his eye-glass. A somewhat incongruous company for one of the corridors of Buckingham Palace; yet a row of faces full of interest, running as they did from ebon-black, through all the shades of brown, and what the negroes themselves call "ginger-color," up to an olive scarcely less deep than that of the Italian peasant. The expressions on the twenty faces varied from calm stolidity through idle interest to gaping amazement.

There was yellow Pete, who had been cook's helper on a Mississippi

A Gourd Fiddle

River steamboat; Babe Provine, who had cultivated a fine tenor voice calling hogs across the Louisiana flats; a half-dozen picked up on the streets of New Orleans, and a half-dozen more from the cotton and sugar plantations. Some were listless, some sheepish, some few looked frightened. But among them all, Orphy's bright, wistful face and large, eager eyes attracted the looker-on.

"But, my dear sir," entreated the professor, "we leave for the Continent—we go by the Dover boat tomorrow. This is our opportunity. The General must already have spoken to the Queen concerning us. In fact, he notified me that he had done so; cannot some one inquire?"

The tall, fair man smiled in a lofty, superior fashion, as though to intimate that the professor little knew

A Gourd Fiddle

the intricacies of life in a palace. "Impossible," he returned smoothly. "Those things come to Her Majesty through certain formal channels. I should not be empowered to interfere with the General's arrangements. He may be here, himself, later. I take it, you should wait."

And with this very cool comfort, the professor was obliged to be content. And so Orphy sat and waited with the others. The great, heavy, ornate building, probably the least beautiful of all the Queen's residences, seemed to the little boy the most magnificent that could be conceived. He had stared about him at the hall in which they sat for fully fifteen minutes before he became aware of childish voices which came from a passage to the right. Twisting around and peering down in that di-

A Gourd Fiddle

rection, he had a glimpse of a big open area, a room, of course, yet all the light seemed to come from the top; and once, across his sight sped the astonishing picture of a flying pony, leaping high in the air, with a little, laughing, flaxen-haired girl perched upon its back. He watched, all eyes, for this vision to come again, but it never reappeared.

Finally the professor went away to make another effort to save his precious opportunity—to try to find some one and urge once more his request for a hearing with the Queen. The large, fair gentleman who had talked to him was passing through the hall, and Orpheus, never afraid to speak to “the quality,” since he felt he knew how to address them, stepped forward and, bowing low, asked if he

A Gourd Fiddle

might go down that hallway and see
“ de little lady in de circus.”

Permission being given, and a footman something above six feet tall being sent to accompany the rather astonished child, he walked down the passage till he found himself in a great gallery which encircled a glassed-in court, in fact the riding-school of Buckingham Palace, where the Queen saw her own children put their ponies to the pole, and her children's children as well. Here the famous cream-colored horses were trained to endure all sorts of sights and sounds before they could be permitted to draw Her Majesty's coach of state in the Jubilee procession, which astonished all London with its magnificence, when the good Queen had reigned over the country for fifty years.

A Gourd Fiddle

Just now there was nobody in the big, light, echoing place but two grooms, elderly and dignified, two ponies, and two flaxen-haired girls, rosy and healthy and bright-eyed, as English children are apt to be, since they spend much of their time in the open air and at robust exercises and sports. These little ladies rode in a way to command even Orphy's admiration, and Orphy was used to the fearless horsemanship of Southern children trained to the saddle from infancy.

They had scampered around the great ring three or four times, racing, as it seemed, the leaping-pole being held higher for the elder girl and lowered for the younger, a proceeding which seemed to offend the little rider mightily. After the third or fourth round, when she had gone over the

A Gourd Fiddle

lowered pole, she drew her pony up suddenly, just below where Orphy stood, and put out an imperious small hand.

“Hawkins,” she announced in a very stern voice, “I want that pole put up exactly where Adelaide has it. Now mind.”

The groom replied with a very quiet and respectful objection in which the word “younger” occurred.

The little lady stood her ground. “Well, I may be younger than Adelaide,” she said, impatiently, “but my pony is n’t any younger than hers, and I am sure it can jump just as high.” And she touched its flank with the riding-crop she carried and swept on.

Orphy was so delighted that he took the method usual in our country of signifying his endorsement of these

A Gourd Fiddle

sentiments. He clapped his hands softly.

The grooms and children looked up for the first time; the little girls were much interested. "How long have you been there, boy?" inquired the elder, "and how did you get there?"

Orphy turned and pointed to the gigantic footman who stood, nose in air, beside him, saying, "*He* brung me. We wants to play music befo' de Queen. She don't know we 's here, an' everybody is afraid to tell her, 'ca'se I reckon she 's got one of her spells."

By this time both the girls had checked their ponies underneath the balcony, and were gazing up. "You and that footman look just like a monkey and his keeper," the younger remarked with great frankness.

"You should be ashamed to speak

A Gourd Fiddle

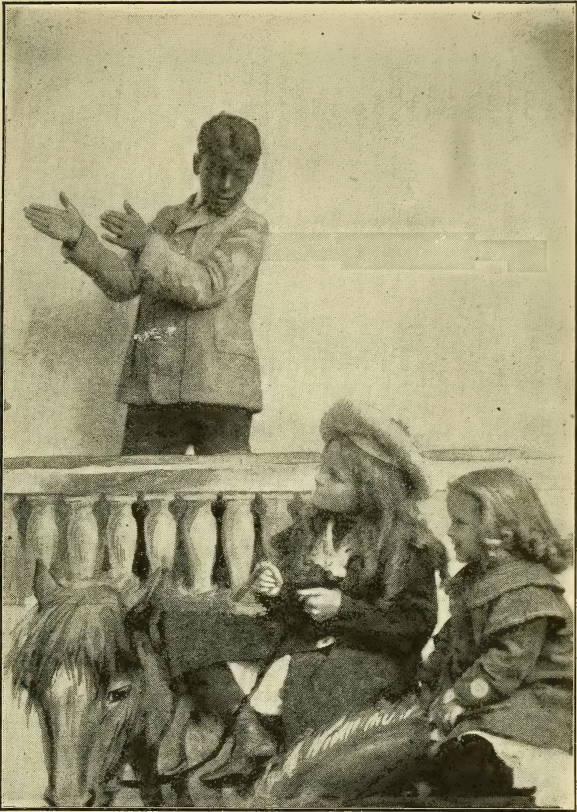
so, Beatrice," the elder girl reproved her in an undertone. "The boy is a nice-looking boy; he does not look like a monkey."

But Mistress Beatrice was not easily put down. "Did you come from India?" she asked. "And what kind of music do you play?"

The English people are much more familiar with the dusky faces of those subjects of the Queen (who is also Empress of India) who come from that portion of her realm than with any other dark-skinned race, and both little girls looked interested when Orphy told them that he came from the United States.

"Oh, then you are a slave," said the elder girl.

Orpheus told her no, that his parents were slaves, and that his great-grandfather came from Africa, but



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"HE CLAPPED HIS HANDS SOFTLY."



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that there were no slaves in his country now.

“Fancy!” cried the elder girl. “How interesting! I think grandma would like to see you—maybe she ’d like to hear you play some too.”

Orphy made his best bow, “I ’d be mighty proud to play for her,” he answered with serious politeness.

“Yes,” Adelaide replied, “people always are proud to play for her. My dear grandma loves music very much.”

“But when she was a little girl,” Beatrice interrupted, “just nobody could make her practice, if she didn’t want to. Once her music-master said to her that there was no royal road to music, and everybody had to practice. And grandma just locked up her piano and put the key in her pocket

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and told him that there was n't anybody could say ' must ' to her."

" But she did practice afterward," pacific Adelaide put in. " She was a good girl and practiced afterward to please her Mamma."

She was scrambling off her pony, and running up the stairs to the gallery as she spoke, with the little one close after her. " Do you play the violin?" she asked. " Grandma loves vocal music and the harp."

Orphy begged them to wait while he hurried back to the seat in the great corridor to get his own peculiar instrument. When he returned, his mighty footman solemnly following, the little girls were charmed; and when, all three children sitting on the steps above the riding-school, he told them the story of how the violin was made—and back of that, to why it was

A Gourd Fiddle

made—their eyes grew wide with wonder and delight.

“ Oh, I must take you right to grandma!” cried Adelaide. “ I just can’t wait to ask Mrs. Cliveden. We ’ll be back in a minute.” and the two little girls hurried away.

Orphy sat on the top step overlooking the riding-school and nursed his gourd fiddle. How very far Aunt Cindy’s soap gourd had travelled, to be here in Buckingham Palace with the prospect of actually entering the presence of the Queen! Orphy could not help a sort of relief, however, that, as the shadows lengthened, the likelihood of this audience grew less. It was a much more enjoyable outlook to play before the grandmother of these two little girls than to enter the presence of a great Queen and Empress who, he had a lingering notion,

A Gourd Fiddle

might order his head cut off, if his music did not suit her, or if it even happened that her temper or her digestion were a little amiss.

His musings were interrupted by the patter of returning feet, when the two little girls came back whispering and giggling. "There 's nobody with grandma now, and she says you may come, if you want to," Adelaide announced.

Orphy followed his two young guides through so many long corridors and grand rooms that he began to believe the entire city of London was roofed in with the building. Finally the trio stopped nearly breathless at a great doorway; Adelaide pushed the curtain aside, looked into the room beyond and said softly:

"Here he is, Grandma. This is the

A Gourd Fiddle

boy we told you about. May we bring him in, please?"

There was a low-toned reply from some one beyond the curtain, and Orphy found himself in a sitting-room so near homelike, so suggestive of the great parlors in the mansion at Spartanburg, that he wondered if it could be in a palace. Seated before the open fire was a placid-faced little old lady in a black silk gown and white lace cap. Her exceedingly plump hands were crossed over a book which she had evidently been reading, her large blue eyes fixed on the blaze which is pleasant company in London even in May.

"This is the boy, Grandma," Adelaide repeated softly, indicating Orphy.

Little Beatrice gave him a push, as he seemed slow about going forward. "And here 's his violin, Grandma,"

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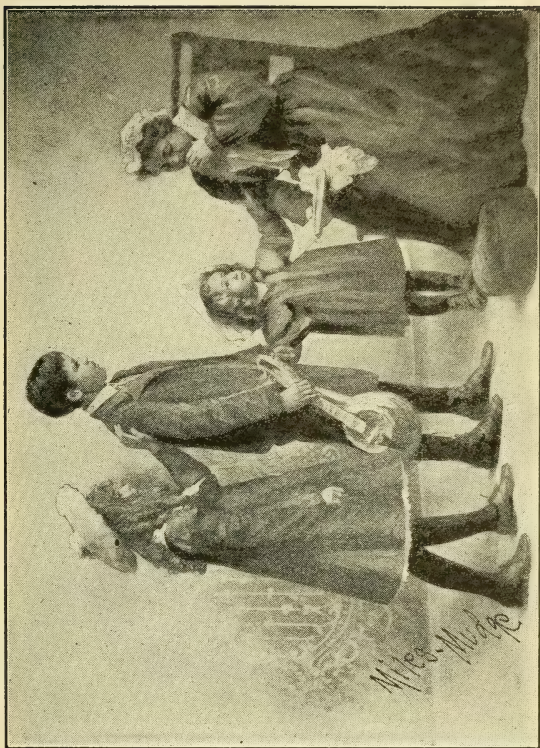
she chimed in; "did you ever see anything like that? He says he made it from a gourd, a soap gourd, he calls it—"

The eager little voice was running on with other details, when Orphy, who felt it had come time to "make his manners," bowed politely and said "Good evenin', Mistis."

"You should n't say 'Mistress' to my grandma," broke in Adelaide. "You should say—"

But the little old lady held up a warning forefinger. "Let the child use the words he is accustomed to, Adelaide," she admonished gently. "Remember what you told me. He will not play well if he is frightened."

Orphy wondered very much what there could be in this placid little body to frighten him. Then he remembered that he had told the children



“THIS IS THE BOY, GRANDMA.”

A Gourd Fiddle



A Gourd Fiddle

how afraid he was—or expected to be—of the Queen. Perhaps they thought their grandmother as grand a personage.

“ I is n’t scared of you, Mistis,” he assured her. I ’s dest a little ’fraid ’bout dat Queen we-all gwine to play befo’. You looks dest like my ol’ mistis at home (Orphy made the mental reservation that Madam Fithian had been much grander in her Sunday gown than the lady before him). “I ’s told de little ladies here ’bout bein’ scared of dat ar Queen, but I ain’t scared of dest common folks.”

Both little girls giggled hysterically, and their grandmother shook her head at them, though not before Beatrice had managed to inquire, “ Do you think my grandma is common folks?”

Orphy hastened to amend his

A Gourd Fiddle

speech with the statement that he meant human people, not queens, when the old lady held out her hand for the violin. It was laid in her lap, and every point of its mechanism explained to her. She touched the strings, handled and sounded the great, bulging body of it. Then she began to ask Orphy about his life on the cotton plantation.

Both little girls were still standing, which seemed to Orphy very strange, and yet stranger was it to him when their grandmother said to them graciously, "You may be seated, Adelaide. You may be seated, Beatrice."

For what seemed to him a brief time, but what was in reality nearly fifteen minutes, Orphy answered questions. He told how the cotton grows, how it is picked, how the cotton-field looks with its pickers all going down

A Gourd Fiddle

the rows; and the boy had an eye for the picturesque and a gift for narrative which pleased his hearers. Then he told of the great house, the days when old Miss and Miss Patrice, the last of the Fithians, lived there, with him for their house-boy; and finally, of Miss Patrice's death and the breaking up of the old home.

And here, in response to questions from the grandmother and grandchildren, Orphy told the story of his desolation when the colonel's violin, that was to have been his,—left in Miss Patrice's will, a sad distinction,—was sold for six dollars to a "po' common white man," and all hope of making something of himself by means of his music died within him. Then followed the history of the gourd fiddle's birth; and thus they came to the question of its powers.

A Gourd Fiddle

When Orphy asked what he should play, the little old lady suggested that she would prefer a native melody. "Some song of your own people," she said, smiling kindly.

Orphy thought of "Sugar in the Gourd," "Billy in the Low Ground," and half a dozen other rollicking dance tunes, which ought to have the patters' accompaniment to bring out their points. Then, as his eye rested on the serene, quaint figure before him, her resemblance to Ol' Mistis suggested that he play Madam Fithian's favorite, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." He could sing with that, too; and the little girl had said that her grandmother was fond of vocal music. So he played it very softly on the queer, throaty violin; then he sang it, with an accompaniment of

A Gourd Fiddle

picked strings, using the gourd fiddle like a banjo.

The old lady leaned back in her chair with closed eyes as the music went on. These native melodies are very touching; tears gathered under her lids, and she wiped them away as the hymn concluded; and she said to the dark little musician, "Your people are a religious people then—they are Christians?"

Orphy answered "Yas, Mistis," without realizing that she meant his race and not the Fithian family.

"Can you sing any other hymns?" the little old lady went on—"hymns of your own people, I mean?"

And Orphy sang on and on, through "Wrestling Jacob," "Go Down Moses," and all the wild, sweet, plaintive hymns of the plantation negro.

"Now, Grandma," Adelaide said,

A Gourd Fiddle

as the last strain died away, “is n’t he fine? Was n’t it right for us to bring him to you? Could we wait for Mrs. Cliveden?”

The grandmother smiled indulgently. “I think you did right, Adelaide,” she said. “Little girls who live in palaces are often very glad to see children from outside. I remember once when I was a little girl, my mother promised to send for Lyra to play upon the harp for me. Lyra was playing in concerts; she was just five years old—I was not much older—and my dear mother thought it would be such a treat for me. And it was. First Lyra played, and I liked that very much; then my mother and the ladies were called away for some matter, and I got out my dolls for the little musician to see. She had never seen so many dolls together, and I had

A Gourd Fiddle

never had a child to show them to before. Oh! we were so happy! My mother did not stop the play when she came back, but let me give poor Lyra her choice of the playthings.”

“That was very sweet and kind of you, Grandma,” gentle Adelaide said. “Beatrice and I want to give this boy something too—may I whisper to you what it is?”

The little girl went forward, whispered in her grandmother’s ear, the latter nodded and sent the footman for a gentleman, who, in turn, went away and returned a little later bearing a long case of beautifully lacquered and inlaid work which he laid upon the table at the little old lady’s right hand.

The room was growing dark with twilight. Several ladies and gentlemen had passed silently out and in

A Gourd Fiddle

since the small concert began. There had been a low-toned consultation and parley at the door almost immediately after the violin's tones were first heard.

Now the little old lady signified that the two children might take Orphy away with them. "I have enjoyed your music," she said to him, "very much indeed. I play upon the harp myself—or used to when I was younger—and I love the sound of any stringed instrument."

Orphy's heart warmed to the little old lady who loved the hymns that had pleased Madam Fithian. The serious trouble which his friend, the professor, felt over his failure to get an audience with the Queen had weighed heavily on the boy's mind; he wondered if help might come from this quarter.

A Gourd Fiddle

“ I gwine to learn de hawp, to play foh you next time I come back,” he began hesitatingly. “ I wisht I could play better dan what I can now. Maybe if I could play good—oh, plumb fine!—and you knows dat ar Queen, you ’d get her to listen to our band.”

“ Was your band to play before Her Majesty?” the little old lady asked, sitting erect and smiling a little over “ dat ar Queen.”

“ Yas, Mistis, we was to play befo’ de Queen; and now de General is n’t come, and de Queen she’s got a spell or sompin, and nobody don’t dast to go near her and tell her ’bout us, and de professor he feels awful, ’ca’sse ef de Queen said we played good, why we ’d make a heap mo’ money en what we will over in France and Germany.”

A Gourd Fiddle

It had all come out with a rush. "So you want the Queen's endorsement to make money out of?" the little old lady enquired gently.

"Yassum," Orphy answered frankly, "and I 'd be proud to do anything to git to play before dat ar Queen, case de professor he 's done mo' foh me dan what I can ever pay foh. I 's mightily skeered of what she might do ef I was to play no better dan what I dest now played foh you, Mistis, but I 's bound to stand it, if it 'll help de professor."

The little old lady was smiling again—after all, the making of money may be a very worthy object.

"Does you know de Queen?" Orpheus asked her.

"Very well indeed," she replied. "I know her as well as I know myself" (here Adelaide giggled). "In

A Gourd Fiddle

fact, we were brought up together. I will see to it that the Queen hears your band—or at least, that she hears you play.”

Orphy looked frightened as well as pleased. “ Thanky, Mistis,” he said. “ I ’s most mightily obliged to you—and if you would please mention to de lady dat I is dest thutteen years old, an’ dat I ’s trying to do better every day, maybe she ’ll come down easy on me.”

“ What do you suppose the Queen would do to you,” the old lady inquired, “ if she did not like your music?”

Orphy thought long and earnestly over this.

“ She ’s ’bliged to be tol’able savage,” he said argumentatively; “ she got all dese people foh to make mind, and she ain’t got much time to fool

A Gourd Fiddle

wid a po' little nigger boy dat don't play his notes right. I reckon she might put me in jail. You don't reckon she 'd have my head cut off, does you? "

The little old lady laughed outright. "The Queen will do nothing unkind to you," she said gently. "I will see to that. Now, Adelaide, you may take him away."

"Thanky, Mistis," Orphy replied, and was turning to depart, when Adelaide pushed his shoulder and whispered, "You must n't turn your back to grandma. You may kiss her hand, if you like."

Suddenly, as by magic, the room was full of people, lights were lit, great clusters of wax candles. He saw the footman doing that, so it was not part of the enchantment. But there

A Gourd Fiddle

sounded in the doorway behind him the voice of the professor.

“It is exceedingly gracious of Her Majesty,” Orphy heard the professor say, in an undertone, “I am most grateful at being offered an audience. Do you tell me that it is quite too late to hope that she would hear our chorus to-day?”

“Quite too late,” agreed the General’s tones.

“It is a bitter disappointment. We leave England to-morrow. If we could have had a word—It would have meant so much—”

The voice broke off. Orphy, with a shiver which made his knees give way so that he knelt before the little old lady in her easy chair, heard the General say:

“Her Majesty has been listening to this boy for nearly an hour. Her

A Gourd Fiddle

Majesty will certainly give you the endorsement you desire.”

Poor Orphy! The Queen, the footmen, the lights, swam before his eyes. He remembered with horror his remarks about “common people.” He recalled with anguish that he had played upon a gourd fiddle—at least he might have done better on his real violin.

Suddenly upon his vision dawned a realization of the fact that he was kneeling at the feet of “dat ar Queen ” and that her plump, pretty hand was just before him. The little lady—Oh, goodness! she must be a princess! and Orphy shuddered again—had said he might kiss her grandma’s hand.

In his abasement he dared not be sure that he was not adding the worst to his atrocities, but he bent forward

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and touched the hand with his lips. Then he looked up into the face above with wide, woeful black eyes.

“Please, Mistis Queen—Yo’ Majesty—” he began, “don’t hold none of my meanness an’ foolishness against de professor. He ’s tryin’ as hard as he can to teach me. I don’t know what make me say dat ’bout common folks, only you dest look so good and kind; an’ seem like Queens—’course Queens is all right, but looks like dey be mo’ crosser.”

Had there been any offense, Orphy had now made exactly the proper amends. The great Queen who delighted in the name of “Victoria the Good,” and who was pleased when a little Irish schoolgirl in Phoenix Park, during the Sovereign’s last visit, cried out “Sure, you’re a nice

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old lady!" smiled down at him indulgently.

That smile emboldened him to say, as he had said once before in the cotton-shed at home, "I could play a heap better for Yo' Majesty on a right kind of violin."

The Queen smiled again, motioned to the gentleman-in-waiting, the long package he had brought was opened, something dark and slender and shining lifted from it by Her Majesty's own delicate, jewelled fingers, and handed to the little negro boy, the child of slaves, who had picked cotton on the Murchison plantation.

"It is in tune—you may try it. It is the Queen's gift, and you may play before the Queen upon it," the little old lady said.

Rigid with fright and pride, Orphy stood a moment bow in air; then he

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played as he had never played before. Mindful of the Queen's wish, he began on an arrangement of plantation melodies which the professor had made for the use of his chorus. The weeks of hard, conscientious practice told in his management of the instrument; but nothing save the wild tang in the blood could give the weird, pathetic shading which he laid upon the strains. An impulse made him add that piece of music with which all public performances close in England—"God Save the Queen."

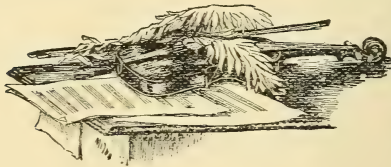
As the last sonorous phrase came to an end, and Orphy, speechless with joy and gratitude, bowed and backed away (as he had been so long and carefully taught to do), the professor was received and spoken to. "Your Majesty is most kind," he said. "I am glad it has chanced that you have

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heard that one out of all my chorus whom I have hopes of making a trained as well as a natural musician."

"It seems," said Her Majesty, in allusion to the last tune Orphy had played, "that the boy is something of a natural courtier as well. He will win his way."

And with this royal prophecy, we leave Orpheus, receiving the thanks of his beloved professor, and looking forward to a happy and successful companionship with the beautiful Stradivarius, the Queen's gift.



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