

"First, that since no wrong-doing led to our misfortunes they should press less heavily upon us. Next, that since we have our children and ourselves, they are not vital. Finally, that before our persevering work they must give way."

Meanwhile outside the youngest Skye was standing with his hand upon his spruce tree, thinking of their difficulties too. The ground was hard and dry, and the air was frosty. Finding that his feet were cold, he put them into rapid motion, making for the roadway. As he collided with the gate, a man who was passing in a gig, drew up his horse.

"Well, youngster!" he said, while his glance swept rapidly over as much of the farm as lay in range. He was stoutly built and apparently of middle age, with dark alert eyes and a pleasant health-crimsoned face.

"Good afternoon, sir!" responded the youngest Skye.

"That's a fine spruce you have there."

"It is."

"Upon my soul, I never saw a finer one. It's a regular landmark. 'T would be a crime to cut that down."

"I don't intend to!" remarked the child.

"You don't intend to!" exclaimed the stranger, removing his eyes from the spruce tree to the boy. "Are you the owner?"

"I am the owner."

"And of the whole estate?" the man asked, quizzically surveying the small creature.

"I am the owner only of the spruce, which was my birth-gift."

"Birth-gift!"

"What my parents gave me," the youngest Skye explained politely, "to show how glad they were to have me."

"Wouldn't you rather have had something else?"

The boy began with a quiver, "I would rather have it than——"

"All the money that couldn't buy it," interrupted the stranger with genial sympathy.

A sudden thought made the little fellow start and change colour.

"No," he said emphatically, "money could buy it."

"What, would you sell your birth-gift, meant to express your parents' love?"

"Yes," with determination.

"Why?"

"To—to—express my love, sir."

"Your parents wouldn't want you to sell it."