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For the National Era.

HERMAN;

OR

YOUNG KNIGHTHOOD.

BY E. FOXTON,

Author of "Premices."

CHAPTER XVI—Concluded.

Romanism again, most indisputably lavish, cruel, unreasoning Romanism. Heaps were given her to trot about with on days of mercy. It was a great and barbarous cauldron to boil them. There is a certain undropped, whose *fortissimi* pedals she dare not substituted as a sacrifice, if any sacrifice was required of her, with the advantage of providing an excellent dinner for her patients."

"Come, come! Stop laughing at what I say. I will join the order of *La Trappe*. I will make a compromise with you, and own that it contains all truth or holiness, and that the Romish church may be no better than she should be; but will you tell me, once for all, in earnest, how it is that she seems to you?"

"Why, when I was disposed to woo her, she appeared to me in a vision, a glorified Lie! a mass of corrupt and mortal beauty, dead and preying on the life of Christendom. Because she seems to me, like a heathen goddess, to delight in the tortures, bodily and mental, and the untimely death, of the fair and good! Because, but yesterday, Constance—for I know, to this day—in her stronghold Romanism for every crime were freely pardoned, because she seems to me, by her false witness, to throw discredit on the true! Because she seems to me often *to cheat the good, and sometimes to make the good cheats!* Because she seems to me to have taken for her motto, where her own interests are concerned, the words of one of her most distinguished poets:

"'Magnum mendacium! a quando e il vero
Sarebbe che si possa a te prepare?'"

Because—the head and front of her offending yet now, I confess, in my eyes—she seems to me to have obtained possession, by unfair management and artifice, of my artless, true-hearted, unsuspecting lady love!"

"Increases to crime! Management and artifice, Herman, you shock and terrify me more than I can tell. Are not you prejudiced? Surely, Bishop Devereux! But you do not know him, or you would know that he was above suspicion of cheating, or being cheated."

"I have often heard of him. I believe he is, in most respects, a man of remarkable excellence."

"'In most respects.' But you do not know him. Those who do, believe that he is, in all respects, a saint."

"I do not dispute—I scarcely doubt—that he may be so, according to his conscience. But I am sickened at a Jesuits' college, was he not? May not his conscience and understanding have been early tampered with?"

"His conscience tampered with!' Oh, Herman, you are prejudiced now, and against the bishop, my dearest friend! against him whom I thought my truest."

"Perhaps so."

"By whom?"

"Yourself, if by any one."

"By me?"

"Perhaps I cannot forget that the first time I met you, after years of separation, I found myself separated from you still—at first, I found, forever. Could not speak to you—could not hear from you the only words which I then cared to hear from mortal lips—could not tell you, when you thought me dying, that I died, as I had lived, your own!"

"Oh, Herman, it was terrible, was it not? But, indeed, he was not to blame. I told him myself that you *were unworthy;* and in pity to me he asked no more."

"But might he not, ought he not, in pity to you, to have asked more? On other points he did not spare you. It strikes me that he should not have volunteered to take off your hands the management of your own affairs, unless he could manage them better for you than you could for yourself. When you followed his leading with childlike trust, which ought to have been so touching to him, and placed your youth and inexperience under his guardianship, might he not, with his knowledge of the world and insight into character, have ascertained whether my offences were of too grave a nature to be expiated by the amount of punishment which I had already undergone? Might he not have tried to find out whether the case was not one in which a reconciliation could be effected by a little delicate paternal mediation on the part of your adopted spiritual father? If he had even had the natural feelings of a man, and still retained any memory of his own youth, he might, knowing you, have guessed what I was suffering. Might he not, before shutting another door between us, have inquired whether natural and early happiness was really impossible for you?"

"I do not know. I wish he had. I never thought of that before. But indeed he meant to do all for the best. He did not approve of marriage; and it was hardly to be expected that he should take pains to lead me into it. Is that all? What else have you heard, and from whom? Speak out, and let me know the worst."

"The worst is nothing that need make you look so pale; and, I repeat, what I have heard against him, as I conceive, has been chiefly from yourself. The world says of him that he is a good and upright man in all other respects; but why an unscrupulous propagandist; what you say seems to me to confirm that view of him."

"It does not confirm my view of him, then. I did not mean to represent him so."

"Oh, Clara! you meant only, as you always do, to speak the truth; and the truth spoke for you. But all through your simple story I seemed to see, as if through a magic chant, the bigoted and crafty priest, leading you blindfold by a sort of spiritual magnetism into the place which he really thought the best for you, or at least for the interests of his church; but all the while assuring you that your eyes were open, and that you were going where you pleased."

"These charges are very vague, Herman. Can you make none more specific?"

"Not of a single direct falsehood; but truths misapplied and exaggerated are often practically worse than falsehoods, because more plausible and effective. He exaggerated and perverted truths, I thought, in persuading you that your really very hard case was hopeless; in describing as he did the disadvantages under which learning and genius labor in women; and in endeavoring to convince you that you might, could, or should not prove yourself a woman of genius. Whether you are one or not, I do not know or care, unless you do: because an amount of genius could make you more dear and delightful to me than you are already, or less; but I do know that your having printed, in these days of universal printing, a few fugitive pieces anonymously without bringing down upon yourself a volley of criticism, is no proof at all, either way. If you had published a volume or two which passed unanswered and unanalyzed, I grant that his test might have been more decisive. With your very uncommon eye for color, form, and expression, I am sure that at any rate you might have given yourself and your friends much pleasure by painting portraits; any such resource would be invaluable to a person in the condition in which you were at that time; and if it required perseverance to become an artist, so it does to become a saint."

"Yes, indeed," said Constance, blushing and sighing.

"It is much better, of course, to be a saint than a poet or artist, if one cannot be, as some persons have been, both; but it is not necessary that one saint should trick another into sainthood by persuading her under false pretences—no, I won't say that—on doubtful evidence, that she cannot be a poet or artist, and that therefore, *faute de* brush, chisel, or pen, she must take the palm as a *martyr-maker*. Oh, there was one thing more! I do wish I could know how that copy of verses happened to come to you out of the casket."

"My dear Herman, do you *not* know?"

"I know how you think it did, I believe. Will you tell me once more?"

"The Bishop thought of me when he was writing it, and in part described me and his wishes for me. By an odd coincidence, such as will happen sometimes, when Aunt Cora dealt the papers round at random, that one came to me."

"Precisely; that was what he meant you should think. I should like to know how Mrs. Ronaldson came to get it to you."

"You shall know at once from her, if the fact does not speak for itself. I shall be glad to be able to prove to you the groundlessness of one of your suspicions, dear Herman; and then I am sure you will dismiss all the rest, as unlike you and unworthy of you."

Constance walked out of the room with a firmer step and higher head than usual, and found Mrs. Ronaldson in her nursery. "Aunt Cora," whispered she, "you remember the night of the children's party. When Annette was the Sybil?"

"Oh, yes, love; how the little dears did enjoy themselves! We must have another."

"Yes, dear aunt. But do you remember how it was that you came to give to me that particular copy of verses which the Bishop wrote—out of the casket?"

"Why, he directed it to you, love, did he not?"

"No, Aunt Cora; it was not directed at all. It was in a blank envelope."

"Are you sure? I thought it was. No. I can't positively recollect; it was so long ago. I'm almost sure the others were directed. Oh, yes, I do remember! That was it. Each of the other young ladies had one directed to her; and I gave you the blank one, because I knew there must have been some mistake. The Bishop never would have meant to leave you out. Pretty, was it not?"

"Very pretty, indeed," said Constance. The one half-proved prevarication served as a clue by means of which her memory flashed back along a long series of more palpable deceits and artifices. She hardly knew how she got out into the passage; but when there, she put her hands to her bursting temples, and exclaimed, "tricked, cheated, flattered, beguiled, where I trusted most! He forced me to the top of my bent! What a vain weak fool I have been! Thank Heaven, that I had already shown it to Herman, before I found it out myself!"

Minds like hers are subject to tremendous revulsions of feeling. In proportion to her unbounded trust was now her unbounded distrust. Returning with averted eyes to her seat by Herman's side, she said, "let us never mention that man's name again. All that he ever said to me of religion is as it were unsaid! You must guide and teach me, Herman. Your church shall be my church; and we will serve one God together."

Herman pressed her hand, but did not pursue the subject. He was sorry for her mortification—not sorry to see, as every Christian householder ought to be, the bishop of the church in his own house. He said only, "We will study the Bible and the best religious books together, and I shall be most glad if we can think alike."

There were few difficulties in the way of it. Constance had become a Romanist from romance rather than from conviction. In one of her sweet confessions to her new director, she said, one day: "I need not blame another's disingenuousness. I was not upright myself. I think, candidly, that it was with me much as it was with Henry of Navarre. I wanted the *cornichon*, just as he wanted the crown of France. I saw no way to reach it, except through the door of the church of Rome; and through the door of the church of Rome I went accordingly, as fast as I could. I listened to the arguments on one side only, and I knew nothing of those on the other; so that my conversion was a sure and speedy process. I cannot bear to think of it now; but indeed, at the time, I did not dream that I might be helping to tamper so dreadfully, as I now fear that I was, with the gospel of Christ. As I have often told you, I acted like an actress. Life did not seem to me at all the solemn and responsible reality that I have ever since been learning to consider it, but a sort of phantasmal tragic drama; and all that I thought of was, to make it as dramatic as possible, fill it with action, play it out, and have it over."

"Perhaps," answered Herman, "when we are twenty years older, and forty times wiser and more experienced, the young men and maidens in our neighborhood, who wish to escape from their empty, disappointed, or unsatisfied hearts, and take refuge in the service of Christ, will no longer need to serve an apprenticeship to Rome, but will come to Father Herman and Mother Constance to be taught how and where to work for a day, a month, or a year."

"To me, Herman?"

"Why should they not? Several of the best girls in our parish are beginning to come to Clara already; and she is not forty, nor thirty. She gives them money to spend in alms for her, buying, I think, a triple blessing to herself, them, and the receivers of their bounty. These young almoners render her a strict account of what they spend, and how, and consult her in difficult cases about the disposal of it. They admire and love her, as it is in the nature of girls to admire and love a woman like Clara. From time to time, she rewards them by engaging some good master or mistress to give them lessons with her, and at her expense, in some pleasant accomplishment. This makes them feel the better acquainted with her, and the more at their ease in seeking her counsel in their little perplexities. Clara has a fine judgment, when she dares to exercise it, in most matters of every-day life; and I believe that her influence and example have done incalculable good already."

"Clara! I can easily believe it—so calm, so sweet, and so considerate! But I have been so utterly wayward and unstable. How could you ever trust me to advise poor girls?"

"I appeal," said he, with his cordial smile, "from Constance past to Constance future."

Herman would not let Constance fall into the bitterness of a renegade, as at first she had seemed likely to do, from the vehemence of her natural temperament, ever prone to extremes, and her special indignation at her conviction, which grew stronger and stronger the more she reviewed the past, that she had been unfairly flattered and decoyed into the Romish communion. He took pains to seek out as many as he could of Bishop Devereux's good and beautiful deeds, which were not far to seek, and laid the glowing list before her, saying, "If he had but been frank and sincere, he would have been perfect, Constance." But frank and sincere, his reverence's best friends, among his sincere and discerning friends, could not say that he was. Some shook their heads, some laughed, when that point came up.

As regarded himself, the man was incorruptible. He might have been intrusted for years with the richest benefices; and he would have lived penuriously, and died poor. He might have been for life the adored director of hundreds of inexperienced and confiding devotees; and no one of them would ever have needed to blush at the sound of his name. When Satan, as sometimes happened, presented himself before him with a cardinal's hat in his hand, and a brilliant little picture of the seven-hilled city, surmounted by the triple tiara for a background, and said, "All these will I give thee, and the glory of them, if thou wilt fall down and worship me," he always ejaculated his "*Vade retro*," with such promptness and energy that Satan executed a *retraite*, which Cellarius might have envied; but, unhappily, he forgot the latter half of that omnipotent adjuration, and concluded it by an awkward mistake with, "It is written, Thou shalt worship—*the Church of Rome*, and that only shalt thou serve."

Thereupon Satan, delighter in compromises, resumed his *poursuite* in a more masterly manner, showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of this world, and said, "All these will I give to the Church of Rome, if thou and the like of thee will only bow down to *flatter a little*, to hold thy tongue when thou shouldst speak, to speak when thou shouldst hold thy tongue, to compromise a little with the wrong, in order that what thou deemest right may the more surely prevail—to be a little false to men, in order that thou mayst be the truer to God; and, in short, to crucify thy pride, by stooping as a Christian to use means for the furtherance of the interests of thy church, which, as a gentleman, thou wouldst kick me, and justly, for proposing to thee to use for the furtherance of thine own." Whereupon the Bishop blushed, groaned in spirit, but bowed, put a cloak upon his conscience, and suffered the fiend to slip under it in the likeness of a fox. It tore him. He was too honest to be happy, though he was too resolute to show his pain. He was a noble and a grand idolater. May God have mercy on his soul. Let us sinners beseech thee, good Lord, that all those whose consciences of his sin are accused, by thy merciful pardon may be absolved!

What, my readers, do I hear you, instead of saying, Amen! thanking God that you are not as other men are, or even as this Romanist? Are you then, rare and happy human being, serving your pure God, by pure means, in your trade, your profession, your politics, your church? Does your brave hand push aside everything which would come between your soul and Him, your knee bow down to Him alone? Do you, respectable sir, never stoop to bow down a very little to Satan, for the sake of the cotton-spinning of the North, or the cotton-growing of the South, or any other sort of money-making at the East or the West? for the sake of the Whig party, or the Democratic party, or any other political party? Of course, we all know that the Union and the world would tumble to pieces, if you did not, just as Bishop Devereux knew that this world and the other would tumble to pieces if he did not; but you know, besides, that there is such a thing as standing "serene amid a falling world;" and so you stand upright, and let the party, and the money, and the cotton, and the Union, too, if they must, take their chance, and trust God, as Bishop Devereux should have done, to manage His own affairs in His own way, without Satan's powerful assistance. I honor you, and acknowledge that you deserve praise, such as my lips are scarcely worthy to utter. "As the husband is, the wife is;" and therefore I need not catechise yours. I am sure that neither does she bow down to Satan at all, neither for interest's, nor fashion's, nor "society's" sake. She loves her servants, her poor Irish neighbors, and even more, *mirabile dictu*, her *parvenue* neighbor, as herself, and persists in acting accordingly in all circles and situations. Her sweet voice has always its sweet word to say, to and for the oppressed, friendless, or slandered, in spite of the frowns or sneers of all wilful or prejudiced oppressors, or slanderers, in *crinoline* or broadcloth.

But you, reverend Protestant, may I ask you one or two questions? Satan has devised for you a bribe as high and as subtle as, though less gorgeous than, that for which your Romish brother fell at his feet. Do you also prove stronger and wiser than he? It has been quite in vain, I am aware, for the tempter to represent to you that he is wealthy, and would, for a trifling consideration on your part, induce your parish to increase your salary, and himself make you very handsome presents. That was not the bribe I meant. You are not to be bought at that price; it is lower even than the cardinal's hat. But Satan is fascinating, and inclined to be fond of you. With all his faults, there is really something very striking and picturesque about him. Though you regret his delusion, you must own that he is evidently sincere in thinking that wrong is right; and if you do not, by telling him that it is not, imprudently shock his prejudices, he will find that out for himself by and by, perhaps. He is fond of controversy, and very ready to believe any excellent doctrine you please, in the abstract, provided you will not call upon him to practice it before he is ready. He even enjoys hearing you condemn your neighbors for any sins, which he is not at present in the mood for. He only begs you to bend to him so far as to put off to a more convenient season the discussion of one or two, which he and his most particular friends are just now indulging in, and to censure those of your brethren who are disposed to meddle with them prematurely. He is fashionable and influential; and if you can only keep him in your sect, he will do a great deal to decoy other members into it. It is very important that your sect should increase. You look upon its increase as the only means for the salvation of the world. Notwithstanding all which, when, in your secret, prayerful, watchful soul, a voice deeper and purer than that of any earthly policy bids you to speak, you speak the truth and shame the devil, and let him bounce from his seat, bang his pew door, stalk creaking down the aisle in the face of your aghast congregation, and take refuge in that of your rival, the Episcopalian, Baptist, Swedenborgian, or Unitarian. Very well. I was afraid that there might be some Jesuits and devil-worshippers, in our days and churches, as well as in those of Pascal and of Rome, but I see I was mistaken.

Herman also made Constance introduce him to some of her old friends in the Sisterhood. He found among them much to admire and reverence, a little to smile at, and some good hints for imitation as well as warning, to be carried out, perhaps, hereafter. He made her admire, approve, and smile, with him, and exercise a little calm discernment in winnowing the wheat from the chaff.

"These good ladies," he would say, "are Christians in their lives, as you who know them testify, if 'patience and abnegation of self and devotion to others' can make them so; and in their creed they are so, too, to the best of their knowledge. They obey the teachings of those whom they were brought up to believe their God-appointed guides. I, for one, will never condemn them for their faith, till I have excelled them in their works. They were delicately bred, you say, and some of them, I see, delicately framed; yet they devote themselves willingly, and even cheerily, year after year, to the relief of squalid poverty, sickness, and ignorance. They are amiable, forbearing, and thoroughly kind to one another. For their sweet sakes, may the sins of Popes and Cardinals, yes, and of Protestants, too, be forgiven; for these humble, saintly women belong, I think, to the Church of Christ, as well as to the Church of Rome. Among their fervid and unceasing prayers, how many, it is sad to think, misdirected to Saints and Virgin, some may yet reach the Father, in the name of the Son, and—who knows?—may help the souls of some nominally enlightened Christians, who, proud of their enlightenment, forget to pray, and, glorying in their faith, forget their works. That dress. I see no vanity or ostentation in it. I do not like it on you; but I do on them. It is their defensive armor, which they need to protect them—the visible shield of the church held over them—when they must go forth to relieve or rescue the wretched, it may be, from the very strongholds of Satan. It is the sorrowful and sympathetic token that they are ready to weep with those who weep; for with those who rejoice, except in their ministrations, I suppose they have little to do. Constance, if a lonely life should ever again be the lot of one of us, I should love to know that it was to be spent in great part in works like theirs, adorning what we hold to be a purer faith."

"'If!' oh, Herman, God forbid! And we need not wait for that! We each in our several ways enlisted ourselves in the service of God in our sorrow. It would be ungrateful, unworthy, base, to desert it in our joy, because he has blest us with one another. No, let us lay our united hearts on His altar. Hand in hand, and side by side, henceforth, let us walk in the narrow way. Strait as it is, it is broad enough for us two to tread together. Imitate our lord, and let me imitate you."

His beautiful dark eyes did not refuse, but met the ardor of her own with an answering shine, that through her's showered down light into her heart; and the beautiful days passed on; and, as they went, she loved him only better and better, and understood him even more perfectly. She grew up into his thoughts as she grew into his affections. She learned more and more to love God above all—but him—"and every man as a brother." She ran, she rushed, she flew towards Heaven in those heavenly weeks beside him, and the last week before her wedding-day had come.

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For the National Era.

JASPER: A ROMANCE.

BY EDWARD SPENCER.

IX.

How Ruth put on Mourning.

[CHAPTER NINTH CONTINUED.]

An hour after Mr. Digest's call, Mrs. Fleming was on the street, no trace of emotion on her calm, lovely face, no tremor in her hand, no falter in her step. She was "out shopping," as the ladies term it, and in one of the stores into which she went, she encountered Mrs. Morninglory. Now, the reader is well aware what enemies these two are, and, especially, what great cause Mrs. Fleming had for being angry with Mrs. Morninglory. Of course, says the reader, they could not do less than give each other the "dead cut," passing one another with scornful eyes, elevated noses, and that sublime unconsciousness of the other's existence, much less proximity, which is, as Mr. Thackeray would phrase it, so delightful a spectacle to the philosophical frequenter of "Vanity Fair." By no means. Mrs. Morninglory was very much of a woman; and women, you know, torture playfully, like the tigress, that tousles, and *mows*, and pinches, and tickles, and plays football with her victims, previously to devouring them. Nothing pleased her better than adroitly to thrust that keen needle of hers into the quick aneath the finger-nails of those she hated. And Mrs. Fleming was far too proud to show any pique. So they met like the best imaginable friends.

"Very fine morning. How well you are looking!"

"Lovely weather, indeed."

"Isn't this Honiton exquisite, Mrs. Fleming?"

"Very neat, indeed."

"I am glad you like it; I have just bought any number of yards—for the ball, you know. One *must* have something. You will be there, of course?"

"Yes, of course. I am looking for something to wear, myself."

"Ah, if I had *your* wardrobe," (it was a genuine sigh, this,) "I would not trouble myself about shopping. By the way, have you heard that ridiculous report that has been started recently about you?"

"Yes, I have heard something concerning it."

"Very ridiculous, wasn't it? Of course, I never believed a word of it."

"Ah! now, how people do misrepresent things. I heard that it originated at your house."

"Oh no, indeed! I only heard it yesterday."

"I'm glad to learn that you had nothing to do with it; though 'tis but a trifle, at best."

"Yes, only a trifle indeed. But I must go; good day. I owe you a long visit—will call soon. Come and see me. Adieu."

"Thank you—good morning."

And the two ladies saluted each other with as much courtesy as do the flags of two nationalities, meeting on the ocean in the "piping times of peace."

"She don't know a word of it, I am sure," reflected Mrs. Morninglory, as she passed on out of the shop.

"She expected to disconcert me," smiled Mrs. Fleming to herself, sending a clerk for a collar of a certain pattern.

It was remarked with wonder, by every one, that, during the week, Mrs. Fleming was more gay than any one had ever known her to be. She attended the opera, and the various other places of amusement, with great assiduity. She had herself driven about in her carriage everywhere; seemed not to notice the cold shoulders that were not unfrequently turned upon her; visited more than ever, and more than ever unbent from her habitual stateliness. Especially was this the case after Mr. Classic's arrival in town. That gentleman, attired as he never had been before—not even in his college days, when he was heels-over-head in the wildest moments of that mad romance of his, (which after all came to naught)—was her constant attendant, or rather follower, for she dragged him after her into all places, to his intense dismay. She made him go to the opera with her, accompany her to the ordinary in the hotel, and ride with her in her shopping expeditions—in fact, she had taken complete possession of him. Acting in this way, Mrs. Fleming failed not to strike the enemy's camp within dismay. They could not understand her tactics, and dreaded them accordingly. And many persons, noticing her conduct, said she could not be guilty, else she would not be so bold; whereupon, in contrite reparation, they began to renew their visits. But Mrs. Morninglory destroyed the effect of this style of reasoning, by reporting that she had it from her own lips that Mrs. Fleming was acquainted with the scandal. Surely, then, she is very imprudent, argued the world, or else entirely reckless, and determined to brave us; whereat the indignant world, terribly flustered at being set at defiance, resolved to visit Mrs. Fleming with its indignant wrath, when the proper occasion should arrive.

There was one person, however, who did not agree with the world in all its conclusions—nay, came to other conclusions of his own, which were by no means agreeable to himself. This was Mr. Clinquant. With the thought of the weapons she had just now employed to defeat him in his first step, filling his mind with dismay, and his heart with mingled rage and shame—not shame for the *deed*, but shame at having been *found out*—with the dread that she might have other means concealed with which to complete her triumph, it was natural that this man, the embodiment of tact, should falter and pause. She had a great mind, he was well aware—a mind superior to his own, because its generalizations were broader, and its judgments more just. He had reason to apprehend her power. But then he was too far committed now to recede. Having to withdraw the magazine-article had cost him much trouble, many lies, and had made him the butt of various unpleasant surmises. Moreover, how could he rob himself of his revenge, his sweet revenge, which was now doubly dear to him, in that the recent circumstances had so greatly augmented the intensity of his hatred? No, no; his revenge he would have, and, *maugre* some accident, of which he would have to run the risk, the present was a more favorable opportunity than any. And he and Mrs. Morninglory were constantly together, developing and maturing the details of the *grand coup de foudre* that was to annihilate Mrs. Fleming, reinstate Mrs. Morninglory, satisfy their mutual hatred, and throw all that social fabric known as "our set" into hysterics.

"But," the curious reader may ask, "where were Mrs. Fleming's natural guardians all this time, when this dark storm was gathering over her head? Where were her relatives? Where all those friends who loved her with such devotion, who made a Maria Theresa of her? Why do not some of her lady friends come forward with advice, countenance, comfort? Why does not somebody scold Mrs. Morninglory, pull Clinquant's nose, and threaten Clarissa with the stocks?"

And the answer, dear reader, is, there was none to do it. Relations she had none, who could be called upon in such an emergency. And her friends in society? She had many; but, I tell you, it was a bold man would tell Czar Nicholas of the pasquinade nailed to his palace gate. Her *real* friends,

"Those friends she had, and their adoption tried,

were not properly "in society," so called; and, remember, this chapter relates particularly to the doings and sayings of "our set," so far forth as Mrs. Fleming was a portion of it. I take it, one has *no* bosom friends in society. We move too much in glass cases there, to be permitted that generous freedom and unconstrained confidence necessary to generous friendship. And Mrs. Fleming, the queen abroad, the introvertive self-sustainer at home, was peculiarly disqualified from having free-spoken friends, particularly among her own sex. She had elected to stand alone in her hours of triumph, and she was left to stand alone in her hour of danger. It was but the strict justice meted out by Nature, in accordance with her universal law of compensation. She thanked herself that she *was* able to stand alone, and did not in any wise repine.

The evening for the ball arrived, and at the conventional hour all the world was there. This ball, which was given in honor of a certain distinguished celebrity then in their midst, was one of that hybrid species of amusements, lying between and partaking of the elements both of the public ball and the private reception; in other words, an assembly. Being such, coming off in a public hall, and having for its managers a selection not made up exclusively from "our set," it comprehended, as we have said, all the world. Not only all who were recognised as belonging to "our set," but also all whom each individual of "our set" recognised on his or her private responsibility. Hence there was a large attendance; for not only the body of the robe was there, but also its lining and its fringes. As your lord of the manor has all his poor cousins to the grand Christmas dinner, though not one of them would presume to pay his addresses to the heiress, so here, all the several acquaintances of "our set" were admitted, though none of them would have ventured to entertain a thought of being invited to the receptions of "our set." A very convenient thing, this arrangement; for "our set," being so highly bred, is a little cold-blooded, and needs occasionally a little recreation. Mrs. Browning's lines on Lady Howe apply exactly:

"If she's somewhat cold,
Who wonders, when her blood has stood so long
In the ducal reservoir she calls her line?"

Well, we below call "our set" fools; and in our turn are similarly epitheted by those lower down in the scale. What, then, does it prove? Anything? We are all snobs, says Mr. Thackeray, and the sayer not less so, perhaps, than those he says it of; in point of fact, one is half tempted to adopt Comte's Positivism, because he has so shrewdly proposed to organize society in terraces—I above you, he above me.

"Thus runs the world away."

Mrs. Fleming and her bewildered escort arrived in due time, and, after spending the proper number of moments in the transaction of those toilet-mysteries without which no woman deems herself presentable, the Queen entered the ball-room, by courtesy escorted of Mr. Classic, but in reality herself the escort. Her appearance created what is styled in the fashionable dialect "a sensation," and, even apart from the extraordinary circumstances in which she was placed, her appearance was such as might reasonably be expected to produce a decided effect. There had been bets made among fast young men that she would not be there. But she was there, and there in splendor. Old men, who remembered her first triumphs in society, looked at her through their eye-glasses, (used under pretence of near-sightedness, but in reality to remedy a failing vision,) and swore lumbagoed oaths that, demme, sir, they had never seen her so handsome; never sir, by Gad. Young men, forgetting intended slights, and recklessly regardless of maternal admonitions on the subject, hastened up to pay their respects, and to have a word with the Queen, ere she was dethroned. And regally she stood there, receiving those attentions. The old men were right. Never had she shone as on that evening. She was a complete mistress of the art of dress, not the *revealing* art of Mrs. Morninglory, but the art of making what she wore appear to be just the thing she *should* wear, and as if nothing else could possibly become her so well. What her dress was I am unable to say—"Jenkins" having failed to transmit me his copious notes of this memorable occasion—except that her colors were dark and rich—that the ruby on her bosom flamed back the daze of gas-light defiantly—that the grand camelia nodded more proudly than ever in her magnificent hair. It was not rouge that gave that inimitable soft glow to her cheek—though Mrs. Morninglory said it was—nor belladonna that made her deep dark eye to flash forth such wondrous life and fire. *Too* brilliant was her eye, one thought, yet what a glorious excess was that too much!

"She reigns yet," whispered Mr. Clinquant to his ally. "Until I depose her," was Mrs. Morninglory's response.

This deposition did not seem very probable just then. For the sight of Classic had created a new feeling in many breasts—that of incredulity. Poor Plato! standing there in thy uncomfortable new clothes, with thy kid-cased hands seeking in vain other resting place than thy pockets, into which they repeatedly subsided, only be drawn out in haste again; with thy homely, embarrassed features covered with blushes, and twitching with fright; well for thee that thou didst not hear the divers complimentary remarks then and there passed upon thy appearance. "Is *that* that the man! Why, he is a gawk, an old dried up anatomy, and looks as if he were frightened to death! You are joking. It *can't* be him. It certainly is not true. A woman of her tastes and her refinement could never love such an object as that! Oh no, it is impossible." In this way the words flew about among the crowd, some laughing, some wondering, some sneering. The partisans and whippers-in of the Clinquant-Morninglory clique were assiduous in meeting all such things with proper arguments, new facts, and startling revelations, as the need was. Amid all this bustle, one man moved calmly and quietly, a philosophic observer, who noticed all things, but kept an especial eye to Mrs. Fleming. Not, however, to aid her, did he observe her, but to study in her an interesting psychological phenomenon, and to feast his shrewd eyes upon the wondrous spectacle of such strength as she was then evincing. This was Mr. Digest, attired *comme il faut*, and looking upon the scene before him very much as the puppet-master watches the motions of his wire-strung manikins. Yet he worked for her in his way too, for he was continually going near Mr. Clinquant, and exciting that worthy into terrible fits of rage by his significant smiles, while his sneers at those who spoke of Plato as her lover, and his open contempt of Mrs. Morninglory, "with her clothes down her back, and her flagrant bosom," helped the cause of Mrs. Fleming considerably. There was need of this help, for the conspirators, working in a body, were beginning to be very successful. The crowd, which had till now gathered about Mrs. Fleming, had now drawn back a little, and was rapidly diminishing in numbers, so that she had an opportunity of glancing round the room. She saw her self-elected rival, dressed as only she dared dress, and laughing loud among a throng of conplotters. She saw Clinquant—she saw—but why does she grow for an instant pale—*only* for an instant—and half raise her hand, as if to place it over her heart? Looking, she saw Gilbert Congreve, with a young lady at his elbow, whom she knew to be his daughter—Jasper's Ruth! Then for the first time was Mrs. Fleming really frightened, and then she began to regret having gone thither. For her thoughts took form after this fashion:

"They have brought him here to witness my disgrace. Or perhaps he has heard of it, and comes himself for revenge. No, no, no; he dare not. He is too noble for that, at least. Why, then, has he come? Oh, Heaven! But I will thwart them yet. *He* shall not see me cringe, at least. To-night, to-night I *will* reign, I *will* be Queen!"

But her face, haughty, yet calm and placid, gave no token of the wild conflict of emotion within her breast.

Others besides Mrs. Fleming were surprised to see Gilbert Congreve there, for, though he had unqualified entry everywhere in "our set," he was notoriously a recluse from society, and indeed personally known to but few of the younger generation present, while none knew his daughter. In fact, this was Ruth's first ball, and she was sufficiently timid and dazzled. She had come to the city only three days before, at her father's request, wondering what sudden notion had seized him, of all men, to attend a grand party, and to take her thither. She had not had much time to give to thought, however, in the agitation consequent upon the dreaded novelty, and the bustle of preparation for it; and, even now, she could not form an appreciable idea of what it all meant, nor how she came there, standing in a blaze of light, and having her ears filled with all that wild blending of music, merriment, and talk. Yet, dazed as she was, there were few faces could approach hers in beauty or in style, and the word was speedily passed around, that Gilbert Congreve the author's daughter would be one of the leading belles, without question. She had observed her father in earnest conversation with several gentlemen, and, standing near him, had several times heard Mrs. Fleming's name mentioned. Was Jasper's proud, stately, cruel mother then present? Oh, how she longed, yet dreaded to see her! And her cheeks flushed up, even at the suggestive name. "What, then?" asks Miss Sophronisba de L'Ame, "was she plump, and round, and rosy, when her lover was gone away despairing? She could not have loved him, or she would have paled away in soul-weariness, and wept herself into stone, like another Niobe. She did not love him." And the young lady tosses her indignant head until the curl papers about her pretty temples give forth a sympathic rustle. But ah, my dear Miss, you will have to excuse our poor little Ruth, this time. I do it sadly and reluctantly, but as a candid historian I must confess that Ruth's organization was defective. She could be grieved, and shed plentiful tears, crying herself to sleep, but *hysterica passio* did not manifest itself in her as it does in your exquisitely susceptible nature. She could not resort to pallor, poetry, and pickles, to assuage her despair. She preferred to bear her troubles as lightly as possible, to go about the house attending to her domestic duties, to solace her idle hours with pleasant music and pleasant books, to wait and to hope, not repining. In fine, she was healthy, and sensible, where you are dyspeptic, and sentimental, and—allow me, with all due deference, Miss Sophronisba, to remind you of so unpleasant a fact—consummately foolish!

Gilbert Congreve had at last finished talking with the gentlemen who were gathered about him, and they had moved off, apparently with some object in view, for Ruth saw them talking with other gentlemen, and with ladies throughout the throng; and she noticed surprise on some countenances, and shocked or angry expressions on others. Then there was a stir in the crowd, and, shortly after, Ruth saw a tall stately lady, standing almost alone, and much gazed at, even, she thought, with insulting smiles and leers; but the tall stately lady seemed not to care in the least about it, but talked on unconcernedly with an embarrassed gentleman, who was—Mr. Classic! Could *that* be Jasper's mother? Most like her, certainly, as Ruth was wont to picture her in dreams; and if it *was* her, oh! one must fear her, for she was a Queen, in right of her regal brow, her grand eye, her statuesque pose! But why was she standing there alone, on exhibition, as if she were some noble work of art just completed, which all the world came to gaze at, standing off, with eyes of critical observation, some praising, some fault-finding—the object of every curious lorgnette! Ere Ruth could arrange this question in her mind, she was interrupted by her father, who, placing her arm within his, led her forward, telling her he wished to introduce her to a lady.

The crisis had come for Mrs. Fleming. She had noticed with quick eye the various ingenious stratagems employed by the conspirators to draw away from her, by a simultaneous movement, those who surrounded her; she had seen how successfully this was done, and that the front line of the circle about her was composed almost entirely of those from whom she could expect no mercy; she felt herself alone, at bay; now was the time "to do or die;" and she felt herself equal to the emergency. Against all slights and sneers, she would go on calmly in her way, and they should never have it to say they had made her falter, or caused her confusion. She kept Mr. Classic by her, conversing with him in an animated tone—not that the poor fellow heard anything she remarked, however, for his startled eye was running round the room as he wondered at this sudden desertion, asking himself what it all meant, and wishing himself a thousand times back at the lodge among his books, or anywhere else out of this social thunder-storm.

"Mr. Classic, they are forming sets for the floor. You must ask me to dance with you."

"I, madam!" His surprise and dismay were ludicrous in the extreme. "Save and except the figures reported to have been moved through by the choral bands at the Bacchic festivals, I know naught whatever about dancing."

"Oh, I can show you the steps. You must ask me; see, they are clearing already, and it would never do now for me to be without a partner."

Plato groaned and rubbed his head in utter despair. "But is it absolutely necessary for you to dance?"

"It is."

"Then," said Plato, rejoicing that he had found a way of solving the difficulty, "I will go and request one of those young men to take my place. It will be an infinitely more agreeable arrangement to all parties, I am sure;" with which ungallant speech he was about hurrying off, when a rough voice growled in his ear:

"Stay where you are, you fidgety old coward. What are you good for, anyhow?"

Plato turned and saw Mr. Digest. That worthy gentleman, who was exceedingly spruce and smiling, approached Mrs. Fleming gallantly, and asked her, in a sufficiently loud tone, if he might have the honor of leading her out in the first dance. There was a momentary flash of grateful light in Mrs. Fleming's eye that wonderfully flattered the lawyer. She nodded assent, and was placing her hand in his, when a stir and a murmur, low but ominous, made her pause.

"Stay," said she to Digest, as if making a simple remark about the weather, "stay—do not interfere—it is coming!"

"What is coming?" asked Plato, who was again close at her elbow.

Mrs. Fleming had guessed rightly. The battle awaited her. Mrs. Morninglory, accompanied by Mr. Clinquant, was moving across the open space, approaching her, and she knew what that meant. They were coming for the purpose of insulting her, they and their followers, by getting her to spe