

A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

X.

"DON IPPOLITO has come, signorina," said Nina, the next morning, approaching Florida, where she sat in an attitude of listless patience, in the garden.

"Don Ippolito!" echoed the young girl in a weary tone. She rose and went into the house, and they met with the constraint which was but too natural after the events of their last parting. It is hard to tell which has most to overcome in such a case, the forgiver or the forgiven. Pardon rankles even in a generous soul, and the memory of having pardoned embarrasses the sensitive spirit before the object of its clemency, humbling and making it ashamed. It would be well, I suppose, if there need be nothing of the kind between human creatures, who cannot sustain such a relation without mutual distrust. It is not so ill with them when apart, but when they meet they must be cold and shy at first.

"Now, I see what you two are thinking about," said Mrs. Vervain, and a faint blush tinged the cheek of the priest as she thus paired him off with her daughter. "You are thinking about what happened the other day; and you had better forget it. There is no use brooding over these matters. Dear me! if I had stopped to brood over every little unpleasant thing that happened, I wonder where I should be now? By the way, where were *you* all day yesterday, Don Ippolito?"

"I did not come to disturb you because I thought you must be very tired. Besides, I was quite busy."

"Oh yes, those inventions of yours. I think you are *so* ingenious! But you must n't apply too closely. Now really, yesterday, — after all you had been through, it was too much for the brain." She tapped herself on the forehead with her fan.

"I was not busy with my inventions, madama," answered Don Ippolito, who sat in the womanish attitude priests get from their drapery, and fingered the cord round his three-cornered hat. "I have scarcely touched them of late. But our parish takes part in the procession of Corpus Domini in the Piazza, and I had my share of the preparations."

"Oh, to be sure! When is it to be? We must all go. Our Nina has been telling Florida of the grand sights, — little children dressed up like John the Baptist, leading lambs. I suppose it's a great event with you."

The priest shrugged his shoulders, and opened both his hands, so that his hat slid to the floor, bumping and tumbling some distance away. He recovered it and sat down again. "It's an observance," he said coldly.

"And shall you be in the procession?"

"I shall be there with the other priests of my parish."

"Delightful!" cried Mrs. Vervain. "We shall be looking out for you. I shall feel greatly honored to think I actually know some one in the procession. I'm going to give you a little nod. You won't think it very wrong?"

She saved him from any embarrassment he might have felt in replying, by an abrupt lapse from all apparent interest in the subject. She turned to her daughter, and said with a querulous accent, "I wish you would throw the afghan over my feet, Florida, and make me a little comfortable before you begin your reading this morning." At the same time she feebly disposed herself among the sofa cushions on which she reclined, and waited for some final touches from her daughter. Then she said, "I'm just going to close my eyes, but I shall hear every word. You are getting a beautiful accent, my dear, I know you are. I should think Goldoni

must have a very smooth, agreeable style; has n't he now, in Italian?"

They began to read the comedy; after fifteen or twenty minutes Mrs. Ver-vain opened her eyes and said, "But before you commence, Florida, I wish you'd play a little, to get me quieted down. I feel so very flighty. I suppose it's this sirocco. And I believe I'll lie down in the next room."

Florida followed her to repeat the arrangements for her comfort. Then she returned, and sitting down at the piano struck with a sort of soft firmness a few low, soothing chords, out of which a lulling melody grew. With her fingers still resting on the keys she turned her stately head, and glanced through the open door at her mother.

"Don Ippolito," she asked softly, "is there anything in the air of Venice that makes people very drowsy?"

"I have never heard that, madamigella."

"I wonder," continued the young girl absently, "why my mother wants to sleep so much."

"Perhaps she has not recovered from the fatigues of the other night," suggested the priest.

"Perhaps," said Florida, sadly looking toward her mother's door.

She turned again to the instrument, and let her fingers wander over the keys, with a drooping head. Presently she lifted her face, and smoothed back from her temples some straggling tendrils of hair. Without looking at the priest she asked with the child-like bluntness that characterized her, "Why don't you like to walk in the procession of Corpus Domini?"

Don Ippolito's color came and went, and he answered evasively, "I have not said that I did not like to do so."

"No, that is true," said Florida, letting her fingers drop again on the keys.

Don Ippolito rose from the sofa where he had been sitting beside her while they read, and walked the length of the room. Then he came towards her and said meekly, "Madamigella, I did not mean to repel any interest you feel in

me. But it was a strange question to ask a priest, as I remembered I was when you asked it."

"Don't you always remember that?" demanded the girl, still without turning her head.

"No; sometimes I am suffered to forget it," he said with a tentative accent.

She did not respond, and he drew a long breath, and walked away in silence. She let her hands fall into her lap, and sat in an attitude of expectation. As Don Ippolito came near her again he paused a second time.

"It is in this house that I forget my priesthood," he began, "and it is the first of your kindnesses that you suffer me to do so, your good mother, there, and you. How shall I repay you? It cut me to the heart that you should ask forgiveness of me when you did, though I was hurt by your rebuke. Oh, had you not the right to rebuke me if I abused the delicate unreserve with which you had always treated me? But believe me, I meant no wrong, then."

His voice shook, and Florida broke in, "You did nothing wrong. It was I who was cruel for no cause."

"No, no. You shall not say that," he returned. "And why should I have cared for a few words, when all your acts had expressed a trust of me that is like heaven to my soul?"

She turned now and looked at him, and he went on. "Ah, I see you do not understand! How could you know what it is to be a priest in this most unhappy city? To be haunted by the strict espionage of all your own class, to be shunned as a spy by all who are not of it! But you two have not put up that barrier which everywhere shuts me out from my kind. You have been willing to see the man in me, and to let me forget the priest."

"I do not know what to say to you, Don Ippolito. I am only a foreigner, a girl, and I am very ignorant of these things," said Florida with a slight alarm. "I am afraid that you may be saying what you will be sorry for."

"Oh never! Do not fear for me if

I am frank with you. It is my refuge from despair."

The passionate vibration of his voice increased, as if it must break in tears. She glanced towards the other room with a little movement or stir.

"Ah, you need n't be afraid of listening to me!" cried the priest bitterly.

"I will not wake her," said Florida, calmly, after an instant.

"See how you speak the thing you mean, always, always, always! You could not deny that you meant to wake her, for you have the life-long habit of the truth. Do you know what it is to have the life-long habit of a lie? It is to be a priest. Do you know what it is to seem, to say, to do, the thing you are not, think not, will not? To leave what you believe unspoken, what you will undone, what you are unknown? It is to be a priest!"

Don Ippolito spoke in Italian, and he uttered these words in a voice carefully guarded from every listener but the one before his face. "Do you know what it is when such a moment as this comes, and you would fling away the whole fabric of falsehood that has clothed your life — do you know what it is to keep still so much of it as will help you to unmask silently and secretly? It is to be a priest!"

His voice had lost its vehemence, and his manner was strangely subdued and cold. The sort of gentle apathy it expressed, together with a certain sad, impersonal surprise at the difference between his own and the happier fortune with which he contrasted it, was more touching than any tragic demonstration.

As if she felt the fascination of the pathos which she could not fully analyze, the young girl sat silent. After a time, in which she seemed to be trying to think it all out, she asked in a low, deep murmur: "Why did you become a priest, then?"

"It is a long story," said Don Ippolito. "I will not trouble you with it now. Some other time."

"No; now," answered Florida, in English. "If you hate so to be a

priest, I can't understand why you should have allowed yourself to become one. We should be very unhappy if we could not respect you, — not trust you as we have done; and how could we, if we knew you were not true to yourself in being what you are?"

"Madamigella," said the priest, "I never dared believe that I was in the smallest thing necessary to your happiness. Is it true, then, that you care for my being rather this than that? That you are in the least grieved by any wrong of mine?"

"I scarcely know what you mean. How could we help being sorry and shocked by what you have said to me?"

"Thanks; but why do you care whether a priest of my church loves his calling or not, — you, a Protestant? It is that you are sorry for me as an unhappy man, is it not?"

"Yes; it is that and more. I am no Catholic, but we are both Christians" —

Don Ippolito gave the faintest movement of his shoulders.

— "and I cannot endure to think of your doing the things you must do as a priest, and yet hating to be a priest. It is terrible!"

"Are all the priests of your faith devotees?"

"They cannot be. But are none of yours so?"

"Oh, God forbid that I should say that. I have known real saints among them. That friend of mine, of whom I once told you, became such, and died an angel fit for Paradise. And I suppose that my poor uncle is a saint, too, in his way."

"Your uncle? A priest? You have never mentioned him to us."

"No," said Don Ippolito. After a long pause he began abruptly, "We are of the people, my family, and in each generation we have sought to honor our blood by devoting one of the race to the church. When I was a child, I used to divert myself by making little figures out of wood and pasteboard, and I drew rude copies of the pictures I saw at church. We lived in the house where

I live now, and where I was born, and my mother let me play in the small chamber where I now have my forge; it was anciently the oratory of the noble family that occupied the whole palace. I contrived an altar at one end of it; I stuck my pictures about the walls, and I ranged the puppets in the order of worshipers on the floor; then I played at saying mass, and preached to them all day long.

"My mother was a widow. She used to watch me with tears in her eyes. At last, one day, she brought my uncle to see: I remember it all far better than yesterday. 'Is it not the will of God?' she asked. My uncle called me to him, and asked me whether I should like to be a priest in good earnest, when I grew up? 'Shall I then be able to make as many little figures as I like, and to paint pictures, and carve an altar like that in your church?' I demanded. My uncle answered that I should have real men and women to preach to, as he had, and would not that be much finer? In my heart I did not think so, for I did not care for that part of it; I only liked to preach to my puppets because I had made them. But I said, 'Oh yes,' as children do. I kept on contriving the toys that I played with, and I grew used to hearing it told among my mates and about the neighborhood that I was to be a priest; I cannot remember any other talk with my mother, and I do not know how or when it was decided. Whenever I thought of the matter, I thought, 'That will be very well. The priests have very little to do, and they gain a great deal of money with their masses; and I shall be able to make whatever I like.' I only considered the office then as a means to gratify the passion that has always filled my soul for inventions and works of mechanical skill and ingenuity. My inclination was purely secular, but I was as inevitably becoming a priest as if I had been born to be one."

"But you were not forced? There was no pressure upon you?"

"No, there was simply an absence, so far as they were concerned, of any

other idea. I think they meant justly, and assuredly they meant kindly by me. I grew in years, and the time came when I was to begin my studies. It was my uncle's influence that placed me in the Seminary of the Salute, and there I repaid his care by the utmost diligence in study. But it was not the theological studies that I loved, it was the mathematics and their practical application, and among the classics I loved best the poets and the historians. Yes, I can see that I was always a mundane spirit, and some of those in charge of me at once divined it, I think. They used to take us to walk, — you have seen the little creatures in their priest's gowns, which they put on when they enter the school, with a couple of young priests at the head of the file, — and once, for an uncommon pleasure, they took us to the Arsenal, and let us see the shipyards and the museum. You know the wonderful things that are there: the flags and the guns captured from the Turks; the strange weapons of all devices; the famous suits of armor. I came back half-crazed; I wept that I must leave the place. But I set to work the best I could to carve out in wood an invention which the model of one of the antique galleys had suggested to me. They found it, — nothing can be concealed outside of your own breast in such a school, — and they carried me with my contrivance before the superior. He looked kindly but gravely at me: 'My son,' said he, 'do you wish to be a priest?' 'Surely, reverend father,' I answered in alarm, 'why not?' 'Because these things are not for priests. Their thoughts must be upon other things. Consider well of it, my son, while there is yet time,' he said, and he addressed me a long and serious discourse upon the life on which I was to enter. He was a just and conscientious and affectionate man; but every word fell like burning fire in my heart. At the end, he took my poor plaything, and thrust it down among the coals of his *scaldino*. It made the *scaldino* smoke, and he bade me carry it out with me, and so turned again to his book.

"My mother was by this time dead, but I could hardly have gone to her, if she had still been living. 'These things are not for priests!' kept repeating itself night and day in my brain. I was in despair, I was in a fury to see my uncle. I poured out my heart to him, and tried to make him understand the illusions and vain hopes in which I had lived. He received coldly my sorrow and the reproaches which I did not spare him; he bade me consider my inclinations as so many temptations to be overcome for the good of my soul and the glory of God. He warned me against the scandal of now attempting to withdraw from the path marked out for me. I said that I never would be a priest. 'And what will you do?' he asked. Alas! what could I do? I went back to my prison, and in the course of years I became a priest.

"It was not without due warning that I took one order after another, but my uncle's words, 'What will you do?' made me deaf to these admonitions. All that is now past. I no longer resent nor hate; I seem to have lost the power; but those were days when my soul was filled with bitterness. Something of this must have showed itself to those who had me in their charge. I have heard that at one time my superiors had grave doubts whether I ought to be allowed to take orders. My examination, in which the difficulties of the sacerdotal life were brought before me with the greatest clearness, was severe; I do not know how I passed it; it must have been in grace to my uncle. I spent the next ten days in a convent, to meditate upon the step I was about to take. Poor helpless, friendless wretch! Madamigella, even yet I cannot see how I was to blame, that I came forth and received the first of the holy orders, and in their time the second and third.

"I was a priest, but no more a priest at heart than those Venetian conscripts, whom you saw carried away last week, are Austrian soldiers. I was bound as they are bound, by an inexorable and inevitable law.

"You have asked me why I became

a priest. Perhaps I have not told you why, but I have told you how — I have given you the slight outward events, not the processes of my mind — and that is all that I can do. If the guilt was mine, I have suffered for it. If it was not mine, still I have suffered for it. Some ban seems to have rested upon whatever I have attempted. My work, — oh, I know it well enough! — has all been cursed with futility; my labors are miserable failures or contemptible successes. I have had my unselfish dreams of blessing mankind by some great discovery or invention; but my life has been barren, barren, barren; and but for the kindness that I have known in this house, and that would not let me despair, it would now be without hope."

He ceased, and the young girl, who had listened with her proud looks transfigured to an aspect of grieving pity, fetched a long sigh. "Oh, I am sorry for you!" she said, "more sorry than I know how to tell. But you must not lose courage, you must not give up!"

Don Ippolito resumed with a melancholy smile. "There are doubtless enough temptations to be false under the best of conditions in this world. But something — I do not know what or whom; perhaps no more my uncle or my mother than I, for they were only as the past had made them — caused me to begin by living a lie, do you not see?"

"Yes, yes," reluctantly assented the girl.

"Perhaps — who knows? — that is why no good has come of me, nor can come. My uncle's piety and repute have always been my efficient help. He is the principal priest of the church to which I am attached, and he has had infinite patience with me. My ambition and my attempted inventions are a scandal to him, for he is a priest of those like the Holy Father, who believe that all the wickedness of the modern world has come from the devices of science; my indifference to the things of religion is a terror and a sorrow to him which he combats with prayers and penances. He starves himself and goes cold and faint

that God may have mercy and turn my heart to the things on which his own is fixed. He loves my soul, but not me, and we are scarcely friends."

Florida continued to look at him with steadfast, compassionate eyes. "It seems very strange, almost like some dream," she murmured, "that you should be saying all this to me, Don Ippolito, and I do not know why I should have asked you anything."

The pity of this virginal heart must have been very sweet to the man on whom she looked it. His eyes worshiped her, as he answered her devoutly, "It was due to the truth in you that I should seem to you what I am."

"Indeed, you make me ashamed!" she cried with a blush. "It was selfish of me to ask you to speak. And now, after what you have told me, I am so helpless and I know so very little that I don't understand how to comfort or encourage you. But surely you can somehow help yourself. Are men, that seem so strong and able, just as powerless as women, after all, when it comes to real trouble? Is a man?"

"I cannot answer. I am only a priest," said Don Ippolito coldly, letting his eyes drop to the gown that fell about him like a woman's skirt.

"Yes, but a priest should be a man, and so much more; a priest" —

Don Ippolito shrugged his shoulders.

"No, no!" cried the girl. "Your own schemes have all failed, you say; then why do you not think of becoming a priest in reality, and getting the good there must be in such a calling? It is singular that I should venture to say such a thing to you, and it must seem presumptuous and ridiculous for me, a Protestant — but our ways are so different." . . . She paused, coloring deeply, then controlled herself, and added with grave composure, "If you were to pray" —

"To what, madamigella?" asked the priest, sadly.

"To what!" she echoed, opening her eyes full upon him. "To God!"

Don Ippolito made no answer. He let his head fall so low upon his breast

that she could see the sacerdotal tonsure.

"You must excuse me," she said, blushing again. "I did not mean to wound your feelings as a Catholic. I have been very bold and intrusive. I ought to have remembered that people of your church have different ideas — that the saints" —

Don Ippolito looked up with pensive irony.

"Oh, the poor saints!"

"I don't understand you," said Florida, very gravely.

"I mean that I believe in the saints as little as you do."

"But you believe in your Church?"

"I have no Church."

There was a silence in which Don Ippolito again dropped his head upon his breast. Florida leaned forward in her eagerness, and murmured, "You believe in God?"

The priest lifted his eyes and looked at her beseechingly. "I do not know," he whispered.

She met his gaze with one of dumb bewilderment. At last she said: "Sometimes you baptize little children and receive them into the church in the name of God?"

"Yes."

"Poor creatures come to you and confess their sins, and you absolve them, or order them to do penances?"

"Yes."

"And sometimes when people are dying, you must stand by their deathbeds and give them the last consolations of religion?"

"It is true."

"Oh!" moaned the girl, and fixed on Don Ippolito a long look of wonder and reproach, which he met with eyes of silent anguish.

"It is terrible, madamigella," he said, rising. "I know it. I would fain have lived single-heartedly, for I think I was made so; but now you see how black and deadly a lie my life is. It is worse than you could have imagined, is it not? It is worse than the life of the cruelest bigot, for he at least believes in himself."

"Worse, far worse!"

"But at least, dear young lady," he went on piteously, "believe me that I have the grace to abhor myself. It is not much, it is very, very little, but it is something. Do not wholly condemn me!"

"Condemn? Oh, I am sorry for you with my whole heart. Only, why must you tell me all this? No, no; you are not to blame. I made you speak; I made you put yourself to shame."

"Not that, dearest madamigella. I would unsay nothing now, if I could, unless to take away the pain I have given you. It has been more a relief than a shame to have all this known to you; and even if you should despise me!" —

"I don't despise you; that is n't for me; but oh, I wish that I could help you!"

Don Ippolito shook his head. "You cannot help me; but I thank you for your compassion; I shall never forget it." He lingered irresolutely with his hat in his hand. "Shall we go on with the reading, madamigella?"

"No, we will not read any more to-day," she answered.

"Then I relieve you of the disturbance, madamigella," he said; and after a moment's hesitation he bowed sadly and went.

She mechanically followed him to the door, with some little gestures and movements of a desire to keep him from going, yet let him go, and so turned back and sat down with her hands resting noiseless on the keys of the piano.

XI.

The next morning Don Ippolito did not come, but in the afternoon the postman brought a letter for Mrs. Vervain, couched in the priest's English, begging her indulgence until after the day of Corpus Christi, up to which time, he said, he should be too occupied for his visits of ordinary.

This letter reminded Mrs. Vervain that they had not seen Mr. Ferris for

three days, and she sent to ask him to dinner. But he returned an excuse, and he was not to be had to breakfast the next morning for the asking. He was in open rebellion. Mrs. Vervain had herself rowed to the consular landing, and sent up her gondolier with another invitation to dinner.

The painter appeared on the balcony in the linen blouse which he wore at his work, and looked down with a frown on the smiling face of Mrs. Vervain for a moment without speaking. Then, "I'll come," he said gloomily.

"Come with me, then," returned Mrs. Vervain.

"I shall have to keep you waiting."

"I don't mind that. You'll be ready in five minutes."

Florida met the painter with such gentleness that he felt his resentment to have been a stupid caprice, for which there was no ground in the world. He tried to recall his fading sense of outrage, but he found nothing in his mind but penitence. The sort of distraught humility with which she behaved gave her a novel fascination.

The dinner was good, as Mrs. Vervain's dinners always were, and there was a compliment to the painter in the presence of a favorite dish. When he saw this, "Well, Mrs. Vervain, what is it?" he asked. "You need n't pretend that you're treating me so well for nothing. You want something."

"We want nothing but that you should not neglect your friends. We have been utterly deserted for three or four days. Don Ippolito has not been here, either; but *he* has some excuse; he has to get ready for Corpus Christi. He's going to be in the procession."

"Is he to appear with his flying machine, or his portable dining-table, or his automatic camera?"

"For shame!" cried Mrs. Vervain, beaming reproach. Florida's face clouded, and Ferris made haste to say that he did not know these inventions were sacred, and that he had no wish to blaspheme them.

"You know well enough what I

meant," answered Mrs. Vervain. "And now, we want you to get us a window to look out on the procession."

"Oh, *that's* what you want, is it? I thought you merely wanted me not to neglect my friends."

"Well, do you call that neglecting them?"

"Mrs. Vervain, Mrs. Vervain! What a mind you have! Is there anything else you want? Me to go with you, for example?"

"We don't insist. You can take us to the window and leave us, if you like."

"This clemency is indeed unexpected," replied Ferris. "I'm really quite unworthy of it."

He was going on with the badinage customary between Mrs. Vervain and himself, when Florida protested, --

"Mother, I think we abuse Mr. Ferris's kindness."

"I know it, my dear — I know it," cheerfully assented Mrs. Vervain. "It's perfectly shocking. But what are we to do? We must abuse *somebody's* kindness."

"We had better stay at home. I'd much rather not go," said the girl, tremulously.

"Why, Miss Vervain," said Ferris gravely, "I'm very sorry if you've misunderstood my joking. I've never yet seen the procession to advantage, and I'd like very much to look on with you."

He could not tell whether she was grateful for his words, or annoyed. She resolutely said no more, but her mother took up the strain and discoursed long upon it, arranging all the particulars of their meeting and going together. Ferris was a little piqued, and began to wonder why Miss Vervain did not stay at home if she did not want to go. To be sure, she went everywhere with her mother; but it was strange, with her habitual violent submissiveness, that she should have said anything in opposition to her mother's wish or purpose.

After dinner, Mrs. Vervain frankly withdrew for her nap, and Florida

seemed to make a little haste to take some sewing in her hand, and sat down with the air of a woman willing to detain her visitor. Ferris was not such a stoic as not to be dimly flattered by this, but he was too much of a man to be fully aware how great an advance it might seem.

"I suppose we shall see most of the priests of Venice, and what they are like, in the procession to-morrow," she said. "Do you remember speaking to me about priests, the other day, Mr. Ferris?"

"Yes, I remember it very well. I think I overdid it; and I could n't perceive afterwards that I had shown any motive but a desire to make trouble for Don Ippolito."

"I never thought that," answered Florida, seriously. "What you said was true, was n't it?"

"Yes, it was and it was n't, and I don't know that it differed from anything else in the world, in that respect. It is true that there is a great distrust of the priests amongst the Italians. The young men hate them — or think they do — or say they do. Most educated men in middle life are materialists, and of course unfriendly to the priests. There are even women who are skeptical about religion. But I suspect that the largest number of all those who talk loudest against the priests are really subject to them. You must consider how very intimately they are bound up with every family in the most solemn relations of life."

"Do you think the priests are generally bad men?" asked the young girl shyly.

"I don't, indeed. I don't see how things could hang together if it were so. There must be a great basis of sincerity and goodness in them, when all is said and done. It seems to me that at the worst they're merely professional people — poor fellows who have gone into the church for a living. You know it is n't often now that the sons of noble families take orders; the priests are mostly of humble origin; not that they're necessarily the worse for that; the

patricians used to be just as bad in another way."

"I wonder," said Florida, with her head on one side, considering her seam, "why there is always something so dreadful to us in the idea of a priest."

"They *do* seem a kind of alien creature to us Protestants. I can't make out whether they seem so to Catholics, or not. But we have a repugnance to all doomed people, haven't we? And a priest is a man under sentence of death to the natural ties between himself and the human race. He is dead to us. That makes him dreadful. The spectre of our dearest friend, father or mother, would be terrible. And yet," added Ferris, musingly, "a nun is n't terrible."

"No," answered the girl, "that's because a woman's life even in the world seems to be a constant giving up. No, a nun is n't unnatural, but a priest is."

She was silent for a time, in which she sewed swiftly; then she suddenly dropped her work into her lap, and pressing it down with both hands, she asked, "Do you believe that priests themselves are ever skeptical about religion?"

"I suppose it must happen now and then. In the best days of the church, it was a fashion to doubt, you know. I've often wanted to ask our friend Don Ippolito something about these matters, but I did n't see how it could be managed." Ferris did not note the change that passed over Florida's face, and he continued. "Our acquaintance has n't become so intimate as I hoped it might. But you only get to a certain point with Italians. They like to meet you on the street; maybe they haven't any *indoors*."

"Yes, it must sometimes happen, as you say," replied Florida, with a quick sigh, reverting to the beginning of Ferris's answer. "But is it any worse for a false priest than for a hypocritical minister?"

"It's bad enough for either, but it's worse for the priest. You see, Miss Vervain, a minister does n't set up for

so much. He does n't pretend to forgive us our sins, and he does n't ask us to confess them; he does n't offer us the veritable body and blood in the sacrament, and he does n't bear allegiance to the visible and tangible vicegerent of Christ upon earth. A hypocritical parson may be absurd; but a skeptical priest is tragical."

"Yes, oh yes, I see," murmured the girl, with a grieving face. "Are they always to blame for it? They must be induced, sometimes, to enter the church before they've seriously thought about it, and then don't know how to escape from the path that has been marked out for them from their childhood. Should you think such a priest as that was to blame for being a skeptic?" she asked very earnestly.

"No," said Ferris, with a smile at her seriousness, "I should think such a skeptic as that was to blame for being a priest."

"Should n't you be very sorry for him?" pursued Florida still more solemnly.

"I should, indeed, if I liked him. If I did n't, I'm afraid I should n't," said Ferris; but he saw that his levity jarred upon her. "Come, Miss Vervain, you're not going to look at those fat monks and sleek priests in the procession to-morrow as so many incorporate tragedies, are you? You'll spoil my pleasure if you do. I dare say they'll be all of them devout believers, accepting everything, down to the animalcula in the holy water."

"If *you* were that kind of a priest," persisted the girl, without heeding his jests, "what should you do?"

"Upon my word, I don't know. I can't imagine it. Why," he continued, "think what a helpless creature a priest is in everything but his priesthood—more helpless than a woman, even. The only thing he could do would be to leave the church, and how could he do that? He's *in* the world, but he is n't *of* it, and I don't see what he could do with it, or it with him. If an Italian priest were to leave the church, even the liberals, who distrust him now, would de-

spise him still more. Do you know that they have a pleasant fashion of calling the Protestant converts apostates? The first thing for such a priest would be exile. But I'm not supposably the kind of priest you mean, and I don't think just such a priest supposable. I dare say if a priest found himself drifting into doubt, he'd try to avoid the disagreeable subject, and, if he could n't, he'd philosophize it some way, and would n't let his skepticism worry him."

"Then you mean that they have n't consciences like us?"

"They have consciences, but not like us. The Italians are kinder people than we are, but they're not so just, and I should say that they don't think truth the chief good of life. They believe there are pleasanter and better things. Perhaps they're right."

"No, no; you don't believe that, you know you don't," said Florida, anxiously. "And you have n't answered my question."

"Oh yes, I have. I've told you it was n't a supposable case."

"But suppose it was."

"Well, if I must," answered Ferris with a laugh. "With my unfortunate bringing up, I could n't say less than that such a man ought to get out of his priesthood at any hazard. He should cease to be a priest, if it cost him kindred, friends, good fame, country, everything. I don't see how there can be any living in such a lie, though I know there is. In all reason, it ought to eat the soul out of a man, and leave him helpless to do or be any sort of good. But there seems to be something, I don't know what it is, that is above all reason of ours, something that saves each of us for good in spite of the bad that's in us. It's very good practice, for a man who wants to be modest, to come and live in a Latin country. He learns to suspect his own topping virtues, and to be lenient to the novel combinations of right and wrong that he sees. But as for our insupposable priest — yes, I should say decidedly he ought to get out of it by all means."

Florida fell back in her chair with an aspect of such relief as comes to one from confirmation on an important point. She passed her hand over the sewing in her lap, but did not speak.

Ferris went on, with a doubting look at her, for he had been shy of introducing Don Ippolito's name since the day on the Brenta, and he did not know what effect a recurrence to him in this talk might have. "I've often wondered if our own clerical friend were not a little shaky in his faith. I don't think nature meant him for a priest. He always strikes me as an extremely secular-minded person. I doubt if he's ever put the question whether he is what he professes to be, squarely to himself — he's such a mere dreamer."

Florida changed her posture slightly, and looked down at her sewing. She asked, "But should n't you abhor him if he were a skeptical priest?"

Ferris shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, I don't find it such an easy matter to abhor people. It would be interesting," he continued musingly, "to have such a dreamer waked up, once, and suddenly confronted with what he recognized as perfect truthfulness, and could n't help contrasting himself with. But it would be a little cruel."

"Would you rather have him left as he was?" asked Florida, lifting her eyes to his.

"As a moralist, no; as a humanitarian, yes, Miss Vervain. He'd be much happier as he was."

"What time ought we to be ready for you to-morrow?" demanded the girl in a tone of decision.

"We ought to be in the Piazza by nine o'clock," said Ferris, carelessly accepting the change of subject; and he told her of his plan for seeing the procession from a window of the Old Procuratie.

When he rose to go, he said lightly, "Perhaps, after all, we *may* see the type of tragical priest we've been talking about. Who can tell? I say his nose will be red."

"Perhaps," answered Florida, with unheeding gravity.

XII.

The day was one of those which can come to the world only in early June at Venice. The heaven was without a cloud, but a blue haze made mystery of the horizon where the lagoon and sky met unseen. The breath of the sea bathed in freshness the city at whose feet her tides sparkled and slept.

The great square of St. Mark was transformed from a mart, from a *salon*, to a temple. The shops under the colonnades that inclose it upon three sides were shut; the caffès, before which the circles of idle coffee-drinkers and sherbet-eaters ordinarily spread out into the Piazza, were repressed to the limits of their own doors; the stands of the water-venders, the baskets of those that sold oranges of Palermo and black cherries of Padua, had vanished from the base of the church of St. Mark, which with its dim splendor of mosaics and its carven opulence of pillar and arch and finial rose like the high-altar, ineffably rich and beautiful, of the vaster temple whose inclosure it completed. Before it stood the three great red flag-staffs, like painted tapers before an altar, and from them hung the Austrian flags of red and white, and yellow and black.

In the middle of the square stood the Austrian military band, motionless, encircling their leader with his gold-headed staff uplifted. During the night a light colonnade of wood, roofed with blue cloth, had been put up around the inside of the Piazza, and under this now paused the long pomp of the ecclesiastical procession—the priests of all the Venetian churches in their richest vestments, followed in their order by *facchini*, in white sandals and gay robes, with caps of scarlet, white, green, and blue, who bore huge painted candles and silken banners displaying the symbol or the portrait of the titular saints of the several churches, and supported the canopies under which the host of each was elevated. Before the clergy went a company of Austrian soldiers, and behind the *facchini* came a long array of

religious societies, charity-school boys in uniforms, old paupers in holiday dress, little naked urchins with shepherds' crooks and bits of fleece about their loins like John the Baptist in the Wilderness, little girls with angels' wings and crowns, the monks of the various orders, and civilian penitents of all sorts in cloaks or dress-coats, hooded or bareheaded, and carrying each a lighted taper. The corridors under the Imperial Palace and the New and Old Procuratie were packed with spectators; from every window up and down the fronts of the palaces, gay stuffs were flung; the startled doves of St. Mark perched upon the cornices, or fluttered uneasily to and fro above the crowd.

The baton of the band leader descended with a crash of martial music, the priests chanted, the charity-boys sang shrill, a vast noise of shuffling feet arose, mixed with the foliage-like rustling of the sheets of tinsel attached to the banners and candles in the procession: the whole strange, gorgeous picture came to life.

After all her plans and preparations, Mrs. Vervain had not felt well enough that morning to come to the spectacle which she had counted so much upon seeing, but she had therefore insisted the more that her daughter should go, and Ferris now stood with Florida alone at a window in the Old Procuratie.

"Well, what do you think, Miss Vervain?" he asked, after the burst of sound had softened a little, and their senses had somewhat accustomed themselves to it; "do you say now that Venice is too gloomy a city to have ever had any possibility of gayety in her?"

"I never said that," answered Florida, opening her eyes upon him in amazement.

"Neither did I," returned Ferris, "but I've often thought it, and I'm not sure now but I'm right. There's something extremely melancholy to me in all this. I don't care so much for what one may call the deplorable superstition expressed in the spectacle, but the mere splendid sight and the music

are enough to make one shed tears. I don't know anything more affecting except a procession of lantern-lit gondolas and barges on the Grand Canal. It's phantasmal. It's the spectral resurrection of the old dead forms into the present. It's not even the ghost, it's the corpse, of other ages that's haunting Venice. The city ought to have been destroyed by Napoleon when he destroyed the Republic, and thrown overboard — St. Mark, Winged Lion, Buc-centaur, and all. There is no land like America for true cheerfulness and light-heartedness. Think of our Fourth of Julys and our State Fairs. Selah!"

Ferris looked into the girl's serious face with twinkling eyes. He liked to embarrass her gravity with the solution of his antic speeches, and enjoyed her endeavors to find an earnest meaning in them, and her evident trouble when she could find none.

"I'm curious to know how our friend will look," he began again, as he arranged the cushion on the window-sill for Florida's greater comfort in watching the spectacle, "but it won't be an easy matter to pick him out in this masquerade, I fancy. Candle-carrying, as well as the other acts of devotion, seems rather out of character with Don Ippolito, and I can't imagine his putting much soul into it. However, very few of the clergy appear to do that. Look at those holy men with their eyes to the wind! They are wondering who is the *bella bionda* at the window here."

Florida listened to his persiflage with an air of sad distraction. She was intent upon the procession as it approached from the other side of the Piazza, and she replied at random to his comments on the different bodies that formed it.

"It's very hard to decide which are my favorites," he continued, surveying the long column through an opera-glass. "My religious disadvantages have been such that I don't care much for priests or monks, or young John the Baptists, or small female cherubim, but I do like little charity-boys with voices of pins and needles and hair cut *à la* dead-rabbit. I should like, if it were con-

sistent with the consular dignity, to go down and rub their heads. I'm fond, also, of *old* charity-boys, I find. Those paupers make one in love with destitute and dependent age, by their aspect of irresponsible enjoyment. See how briskly each of them topples along on the leg that he has n't got in the grave! How attractive likewise are the civilian devotees in those imperishable dress-coats of theirs! Observe their high coat-collars of the era of the Holy Alliance: they and their fathers and their grandfathers before them have worn those dress-coats; in a hundred years from now their posterity will keep holiday in them. I should like to know the elixir by which the dress-coats of civil employees render themselves immortal. Those penitents in the cloaks and cowls are not bad, either, Miss Vervain. Come, they add a very pretty touch of mystery to this spectacle. They're the sort of thing that painters are expected to paint in Venice — that people sigh over as so peculiarly Venetian. If you've a single sentiment about you, Miss Vervain, now is the time to produce it."

"But I have n't. I'm afraid I have no sentiment at all," answered the girl ruefully. "But this makes me dreadfully sad."

"Why that's just what I was saying a while ago. Excuse me, Miss Vervain, but your sadness lacks novelty; it's a sort of plagiarism."

"Don't, please," she pleaded yet more earnestly. "I was just thinking — I don't know why such an awful thought should come to me — that it might all be a mistake after all; perhaps there might not be any other world, and every bit of this power and display of the church — *our* church as well as the rest — might be only a cruel blunder, a dreadful mistake. Perhaps there is n't even any God! Do *you* think there is?"

"I don't *think* it," said Ferris gravely, "I *know* it. But I don't wonder that this sight makes you doubt. Great God! How far it is from Christ! Look there, at those troops who go before the

followers of the Lamb: their trade is murder. In a minute, if a dozen men called out, 'Long live the King of Italy!' it would be the duty of those soldiers to fire into the helpless crowd. Look at the silken and gilded pomp of the servants of the carpenter's son! Look at those miserable monks, voluntary prisoners, beggars, aliens to their kind! Look at those penitents who think that they can get forgiveness for their sins by carrying a candle round the square! And it is nearly two thousand years since the world turned Christian! It is pretty slow. But I suppose God lets men learn him from their own experience of evil. I imagine the kingdom of heaven is a sort of republic, and that God draws men to him only through their perfect freedom."

"Yes, yes, it must be so," answered the girl, staring down on the crowd with unseeing eyes, "but I can't fix my mind on it. I keep thinking the whole time of what we were talking about yesterday. I never could have dreamed of a priest's disbelieving; but now I can't dream of anything else. It seems to me that none of these priests or monks can believe anything. Their faces look false and sly and bad — *all* of them!"

"No, no, Miss Vervain," said Ferris, smiling at her despair, "you push matters a little beyond — as a woman has a right to do, of course. I don't think their faces are bad, by any means. Some of them are dull and torpid, and some are frivolous, just like the faces of other people. But I've been noticing the number of good, kind, friendly faces, and they're in the majority, just as they are amongst other people; for there are very few souls altogether out of drawing, in my opinion. I've even caught sight of some faces in which there was a real rapture of devotion, and now and then a very innocent one.

Here, for instance, is a man I should like to bet on, if he'd only look up."

The priest whom Ferris indicated was slowly advancing toward the space immediately under their window. He was dressed in robes of high ceremony, and in his hand he carried a lighted taper. He moved with a gentle tread, and the droop of his slender figure intimated a sort of despairing weariness. While most of his fellows stared carelessly or curiously about them, his face was downcast and averted.

Suddenly the procession paused, and a hush fell upon the vast assembly. Then the silence was broken by the rustle and stir of all those thousands going down upon their knees, as the cardinal-patriarch lifted his hands to bless them.

The priest upon whom Ferris and Florida had fixed their eyes faltered a moment, and before he knelt his next neighbor had to pluck him by the skirt. Then he too knelt hastily, mechanically lifting his head, and glancing along the front of the Old Procuratie. His face had that weariness in it which his figure and movement had suggested, and it was very pale, but it was yet more singular for the troubled innocence which its traits expressed.

"There," whispered Ferris, "that's what I call an uncommonly good face."

Florida raised her hand to silence him, and the heavy gaze of the priest rested on them coldly at first. Then a light of recognition shot into his eyes and a flush suffused his pallid visage, which seemed to grow the more haggard and desperate. His head fell again, and he dropped the candle from his hand. One of those beggars who went by the side of the procession, to gather the drippings of the tapers, restored it to him.

"Why," said Ferris aloud, "it's Don Ippolito! Did you know him at first?"

W. D. Howells.

RECENT LITERATURE.¹

THERE are three objects, easily conceived, which might at this day move a competent hand to undertake the composition of a new biography of the founder of the Christian religion. That method might be chosen to introduce or recommend to the world a particular view of the nature, character, or career of this person, or of the sense of his teachings. Such a work might also aim to establish an original theory of the literary sources from which most of our knowledge of him is drawn, to correct or supersede those sacred books called the Gospels of the New Testament. Or it might simply endeavor to regather the materials and recast the form of the familiar narrative, to invest it with whatever fresh attractions the genius of the writer or his researches in the various departments of modern scholarship should be able to supply; and so to strengthen or vitalize the current Christian belief, in men who hold it already. In other words, we might take up a life of Jesus reasonably expecting to find it constructed in the interest of dogmatic theology, of philosophical and historical criticism, or of the religious edification of Christendom as it now is. In the world of purely scientific inquiry and speculative thought either of the two former lines of effort would undoubtedly be regarded as the more important. Whether it is a

harder test of intellectual power, however, to achieve a great success in either of those than in the latter, is at least doubtful. Any novel attempt at the telling of so old a story, in which we do not feel a touch of signal strength, must be insignificant if not impertinent. A critical analysis of the poetry of Homer would be an easier enterprise than a paraphrase of the Iliad. On the history or geology of Palestine ten men might venture to make treatises where one would dare to paint the landscape seen eastward from Mount Lebanon.

Being an honest clergyman of the church of England, and putting a simple construction on his ordination vows, Dr. Farrar writes of course as an unquestioning believer in the canonical Scriptures. Having gained a considerable English reputation for classical and general scholarship in his Cambridge fellowship, and earning a still greater celebrity as a preacher of uncommon breadth of mind and richness of style, he became generally known to readers of religious literature in this country through his Halsean Lectures of 1870. According to the terms of the foundation, his business before the university at that time was to defend the dogmatic thesis of the divinity of Christ. His treatment of the subject proved at once his independence of routine methods, his impatience of both scholastic

¹ *The Life of Christ.* By FREDERIC W. FARRAR, D. D., F. R. S., late Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, Master of Marlborough College, and Chaplain in Ordinary to the Queen. *Maet Immuta Fides.* In two Volumes. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1874.

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