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 mustn'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."
A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

"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 honoured 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 the 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 morn-
ing.” 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; hasn’t he now, in Italian?”

They began to read the comedy; after fifteen or twenty minutes, Mrs. Vervain 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 slightly. 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 characterised her, "Why don't you like to walk in the procession of Corpus Domini?"

Don Ippolito's colour 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 needn'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 con-
trasted it, was more touching than any tragic demonstration.

As if she felt the fascination of the pathos which she could not fully analyse, 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 grieved 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 in Padua, 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 certain pause he began abruptly, "We are of the people, my family, and in each generation we have sought to honour 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 worshippers 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 me: 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 neighbourhood 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 merely 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. 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 priests' 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 armour. 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 attempting
to withdraw now 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 due course I became a priest.

'It was not without sufficient 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 the 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 labours 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 save 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 girl, who had listened with her proud looks transfigured to an aspect of grieving pity, fetched a long sigh. "Cech, 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 temptations enough 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 worshipped 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, colouring 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.”
"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 death-beds 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 cruellest bigot, for he at least believes in himself."

"Worse, far worse!"

"But at least, dear young lady," he went on pitifully, "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 isn'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, madamigolla," 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 favourite dish. When he saw this, "Well, Mrs. Vervain, what is it?" he asked. "You needn'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 banter 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 couldn'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, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was and it wasn'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 sceptical 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 inti-
mately 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 isn’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 damned 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 isn'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 isn'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 sceptical 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 didn't see how it could be managed." Ferris did not note the change that passed over Florida's face, and he continued. "Our acquaintance hasn'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 Vernay, a minister doesn't set up for so much. He doesn't pretend to forgive us our sins, and he doesn't ask us to confess them; he doesn't offer us the veritable body and blood in the sacrament, and he doesn't bear allegiance to the visible and tangible vicegerent of Christ upon earth. A hypocritical parson may be absurd; but a sceptical priest is tragic."

"Yes, O 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 sceptic?" she asked very earnestly.

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

"Shouldn't you be very sorry for him?" pursued Florida, still more solemnly.
"I should indeed, if I liked him. If I didn't, I'm afraid I shouldn'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 daresay they'll be all of them devout believers, accepting everything, down to the animacula 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 isn'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 despise 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 daresay if a priest found himself drifting into doubt, he'd try to avoid the disagreeable subject, and, if he couldn't, he'd philosophise it some way, and wouldn't let his scepticism worry him."

"Then you mean that they haven'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 haven't answered my question."

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

"But suppose it was."

"Well, if I must," answered Ferris with a laugh. "With my unfortunate bringing up, I couldn'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
cat 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 Branta,
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 shouldn't you abhor him if he were a sceptical 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 recognised as perfect truthfulness, and couldn'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.
A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

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.
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 trans-
formed from a mart, from a salon, to a
temple. The shops under the colonnades
that enclose it upon three sides were shut;
the caffés, 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 or Palermo and black
cherries of Padua, had vanished from the
base of the church of St. Mark, which with
its dim splendour of mosaics and its carven
luxury of pillar and arch and finial rose like
the high-altar; ineffably rich and beautiful,
of the vaster temple whose enclosure 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, when their senses had
somewhat accustomed themselves to the noise of the procession; "do you say now that Venice is too gloomy a city to have ever had any possibility of gaiety in her?"

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

"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, Bucentaur, 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 his antic speeches, and enjoyed her endeavours 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 favourites," he continued, surveying the long column through an opera-glass. "My religious disadvantages have been such that
A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

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 consistent 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 hasn't got in the grave! How attractive likewise are the civilian devotees in those imperishable dress-coats of theirs! Observe their high 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 employés 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 haven'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 isn'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, and men 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 Florida, 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 neighbour 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?"
XIII.

The ladies were sitting on the terrace when Don Ippolito came next morning to say that he could not read with Miss Vervain that day nor for several days after, alleging in excuse some priestly duties proper to the time. Mrs. Vervain began to lament that she had not been able to go to the procession of the day before. "I meant to have kept a sharp look-out for you; Florida saw you, and so did Mr. Ferris. But it isn't at all the same thing, you know. Florida has no faculty for describing; and now I shall probably go away from Venice without seeing you in your real character once."

Don Ippolito suffered this and more in meek silence. He waited his opportunity with unfailing politeness, and then with gentle punctilio took his leave.

"Well, come again as soon as your duties will let you, Don Ippolito," cried Mrs. Vervain. "We shall miss you dreadfully,
and I begrudge every one of your readings that Florida loses."

The priest passed, with the sliding step which his impeding drapery imposed, down the garden walk, and was half-way to the gate, when Florida, who had stood watching him, said to her mother, "I must speak to him again," and lightly descended the steps, and swiftly glided in pursuit.

"Don Ippolito!" she called.

He already had his hand upon the gate, but he turned, and rapidly went back to meet her.

She stood in the walk where she had stopped when her voice arrested him, breathing quickly. Their eyes met; a painful shadow overcast the face of the young girl, who seemed to be trying in vain to speak.

Mrs. Vervain put on her glasses and peered down at the two with good-natured curiosity.

"Well, madamigella," said the priest at last, "what do you command me?" He gave a faint patient sigh.

The tears came into her eyes. "Oh," she began vehemently, "I wish there was some one who had the right to speak to you!"

"No one," answered Don Ippolito, "has so much the right as you."

"I saw you yesterday," she began again,
“and I thought of what you had told me, Don Ippolito.”

“Yes, I thought of it, too,” answered the priest; “I have thought of it ever since.”

“But haven’t you thought of any hope for yourself? Must you still go on as before? How can you go back now to those things, and pretend to think them holy, and all the time have no heart or faith in them? It’s terrible!”

“What would you, madamigella?” demanded Don Ippolito, with a moody shrug.

“It is my profession, my trade, you know. You might say to the prisoner,” he added bitterly, “‘It is terrible to see you chained here.’ Yes, it is terrible. Oh, I don’t reject your compassion! But what can I do?”

“Sit down with me here,” said Florida in her blunt, child-like way, and sank upon the stone seat beside the walk. She clasped her hands together in her lap with some strong, bashful emotion, while Don Ippolito, obeying her command, waited for her to speak. Her voice was scarcely more than a hoarse whisper when she began.

“I don’t know how to begin what I want to say. I am not fit to advise any one. I am so young, and so very ignorant of the world.”
"I too know little of the world," said the priest, as much to himself as to her.

"It may be all wrong, all wrong. Besides," she said abruptly, "how do I know that you are a good man, Don Ippolito? How do I know that you've been telling me the truth? It may be all a kind of trap"—

He looked blankly at her.

"This is in Venice; and you may be leading me on to say things to you that will make trouble for my mother and me. You may be a spy"—

"Oh no, no, no!" cried the priest, springing to his feet with a kind of moan and a shudder, "God forbid!" He swiftly touched her hand with the tip of his fingers, and then kissed them: an action of inexpressible humility. "Madamigella, I swear to you by everything you believe good that I would rather die than be false to you in a single breath or thought."

"Oh, I know it, I know it," she murmured. "I don't see how I could say such a cruel thing."

"Not cruel; no, madamigella, not cruel," softly pleaded Don Ippolito.

"But—but is there no escape for you?"

They looked steadfastly at each other for a moment, and then Don Ippolito spoke.
“Yes,” he said very gravely, “there is one way of escape. I have often thought of it, and once I thought I had taken the first step towards it; but it is beset with many great obstacles, and to be a priest makes one timid and insecure.”

He lapsed into his musing melancholy with the last words; but she would not suffer him to lose whatever heart he had begun to speak with. “That’s nothing,” she said, “you must think again of that way of escape, and never turn from it till you have tried it. Only take the first step and you can go on. Friends will rise up everywhere, and make it easy for you. Come,” she implored him fervently, “you must promise.”

He bent his dreamy eyes upon her.

“If I should take this only way of escape, and it seemed desperate to all others, would you still be my friend?”

“I should be your friend if the whole world turned against you.”

“Would you be my friend,” he asked eagerly in lower tones, and with signs of an inward struggle, “if this way of escape were for me to be no longer a priest?”

“Oh yes, yes! Why not?” cried the girl; and her face glowed with heroic sympathy and defiance. It is from this heaven-born
ignorance in women of the insuperable difficulties of doing right that men take fire and accomplish the sublime impossibilities. Our sense of details, our fatal habits of reasoning paralyse us; we need the impulse of the pure ideal which we can get only from them. These two were alike children as regarded the world, but he had a man's dark prevision of the means, and she a heavenly scorn of everything but the end to be achieved.

He drew a long breath. "Then it does not seem terrible to you?"

"Terrible? No! I don't see how you can rest till it is done!"

"Is it true, then, that you urge me to this step, which indeed I have so long desired to take?"

"Yes, it is true! Listen, Don Ippolito: it is the very thing that I hoped you would do, but I wanted you to speak of it first. You must have all the honour of it, and I am glad you thought of it before. You will never regret it!"

She smiled radiantly upon him, and he kindled at her enthusiasm. In another moment his face darkened again. "But it will cost much," he murmured.

"No matter," cried Florida. "Such a man as you ought to leave the priesthood at
any risk or hazard. You should cease to be a priest, if it cost you kindred, friends, good fame, country, everything!” She blushed with irrelevant consciousness. “Why need you be downhearted? With your genius once free, you can make country and fame and friends everywhere. Leave Venice! There are other places. Think how inventors succeed in America”—

“In America!” exclaimed the priest. “Ah, how long I have desired to be there!”

“You must go. You will soon be famous and honoured there, and you shall not be a stranger, even at the first. Do you know that we are going home very soon? Yes, my mother and I have been talking of it to-day. We are both homesick, and you see that she is not well. You shall come to us there, and make our house your home till you have formed some plans of your own. Everything will be easy. God is good,” she said in a breaking voice, “and you may be sure He will befriend you.”

“Some one,” answered Don Ippolito, with tears in his eyes, “has already been very good to me. I thought it was you, but I will call it God!”

“Hush! You mustn’t say such things. But you must go, now. Take time to think,
but not too much time. Only,—be true to yourself."

They rose, and she laid her hand on his arm with an instinctive gesture of appeal. He stood bewildered. Then "Thanks, madamigella, thanks!" he said, and caught her fragrant hand to his lips. He loosed it and lifted both his arms by a blind impulse in which he arrested himself with a burning blush, and turned away. He did not take leave of her with his wonted formalities, but hurried abruptly toward the gate.

A panic seemed to seize her as she saw him open it. She ran after him. "Don Ippolito, Don Ippolito," she said, coming up to him; and stammered and faltered. "I don't know; I am frightened. You must do nothing from me; I cannot let you; I'm not fit to advise you. It must be wholly from your own conscience. Oh no, don't look so! I will be your friend, whatever happens. But if what you think of doing has seemed so terrible to you, perhaps it is more terrible than I can understand. If it is the only way, it is right. But is there no other? What I mean is, have you no one to talk all this over with? I mean, can't you speak of it to—to Mr. Ferris? He is so true and honest and just."
"I was going to him," said Don Ippolito, with a dim trouble in his face.

"Oh, I am so glad of that! Remember, I don't take anything back. No matter what happens, I will be your friend. But he will tell you just what to do."

Don Ippolito bowed and opened the gate.

Florida went back to her mother, who asked her, "What in the world have you and Don Ippolito been talking about so earnestly? What makes you so pale and out of breath?"

"I have been wanting to tell you, mother," said Florida. She drew her chair in front of the elder lady, and sat down.
XIV.

DON IPPOLITO did not go directly to the painter's. He walked toward his house at first, and then turned aside, and wandered out through the noisy and populous district of Canaregio to the Campo di Marte. A squad of cavalry which had been going through some exercises there was moving off the parade ground; a few infantry soldiers were strolling about under the trees. Don Ippolito walked across the field to the border of the lagoon, where he began to pace to and fro, with his head sunk in deep thought. He moved rapidly, but sometimes he stopped and stood still in the sun, whose heat he did not seem to feel, though a perspiration bathed his pale face and stood in drops on his forehead under the shadow of his nicchio. Some little dirty children of the poor, with which this region swarms, looked at him from the sloping shore of the Campo di Giustizia, where the executions used to take place, and a small
boy began to mock his movements and pauses, but was arrested by one of the girls, who shook him and gesticulated warningly.

At this point the long railroad bridge which connects Venice with the mainland is in full sight, and now from the reverie in which he continued, whether he walked or stood still, Don Ippolito was roused by the whistle of an outward train. He followed it with his eye as it streamed along over the far-stretching arches, and struck out into the flat, salt marshes beyond. When the distance hid it, he put on his hat, which he had unknowingly removed, and turned his rapid steps toward the railroad station. Arrived there, he lingered in the vestibule for half-an-hour, watching the people as they bought their tickets for departure, and had their baggage examined by the customs officers, and weighed and registered by the railroad porters, who passed it through the wicket shutting out the train, while the passengers gathered up their smaller parcels and took their way to the waiting-rooms. He followed a group of English people some paces in this direction, and then returned to the wicket, through which he looked long and wistfully at the train. The baggage was all passed through; the doors of the
waiting-rooms were thrown open with harsh proclamation by the guards, and the passengers flocked into the carriages. Whistles and bells were sounded, and the train crept out of the station.

A man in the company's uniform approached the unconscious priest, and striking his hands softly together, said with a pleasant smile, "Your servant, Don Ippolito. Are you expecting some one?"

"Ah, good day!" answered the priest, with a little start. "No," he added, "I was not looking for any one."

"I see," said the other. "Amusing yourself as usual with the machinery. Excuse the freedom, Don Ippolito; but you ought to have been of our profession,—ha, ha! When you have the leisure, I should like to show you the drawing of an American locomotive which a friend of mine has sent me from Nuova York. It is very different from ours, very curious. But monstrous in size, you know, prodigious! May I come with it to your house, some evening?"

"You will do me a great pleasure," said Don Ippolito. He gazed dreamily in the direction of the vanished train. "Was that the train for Milan?" he asked presently.
"Exactly," said the man.
"Does it go all the way to Milan?"
"Oh, no! it stops at Peschiera; where the passengers have their passports examined; and then another train backs down from Desenzano and takes them on to Milan. And after that," continued the man with animation, "if you are on the way to England, for example, another train carries you to Susa, and there you get the diligence over the mountain to St. Michol, where you take railroad again, and so on up through Paris to Boulogne-sur-Mer, and then by steamer to Folkestone, and then by railroad to London and to Liverpool. It is at Liverpool that you go on board the steamer for America, and piff! in ten days you are in Nuova York. My friend has written me all about it."

"Ah yes, your friend. Does he like it there in America?"

"Passably, passably. The Americans have no manners; but they are good devils. They are governed by the Irish. And the wine is dear. But he likes America yes, he likes it. Nuova York is a fine city. But immense, you know! Eight times as large as Venice!"

"Is your friend prosperous there?"
"Ah heigh! That is the prettiest part of the story. He has made himself rich. He is employed by a large house to make designs for mantelpieces, and marble tables, and tombs; and he has—listen!—six hundred francs a month!"

"Oh per Bacco!" cried Don Ippolito.

"Honestly. But you spend a great deal there. Still, it is magnificent, is it not? If it were not for that blessed war there, now, that would be the place for you, Don Ippolito. He tells me the Americans are actually mad for inventions.—Your servant. Excuse the freedom, you know," said the man, bowing and moving away.

"Nothing, dear, nothing," answered the priest. He walked out of the station with a light step, and went to his own house, where he sought the room in which his inventions were stored. He had not touched them for weeks. They were all dusty, and many were cobwebbed. He blew the dust from some, and bringing them to the light, examined them critically, finding them mostly disabled in one way or other, except the models of the portable furniture which he polished with his handkerchief and set apart, surveying them from a distance with a look of hope. He took up the breech-loading can-
non and then suddenly put it down again with a little shiver, and went to the threshold of the perverted oratory and glanced in at his forge. Veneranda had carelessly left the window open, and the draught had carried the ashes about the floor. On the cinder-heap lay the tools which he had used in mending the broken pipe of the fountain at Casa Vervain, and had not used since. The place seemed chilly even on that summer's day. He stood in the doorway with clenched hands. Then he called Veneranda, chid her for leaving the window open, and bade her close it, and so quitted the house and left her muttering.

Ferris seemed surprised to see him when he appeared at the consulate near the middle of the afternoon, and seated himself in the place where he was wont to pose for the painter.

"Were you going to give me a sitting?" asked the latter, hesitating. "The light is horrible, just now, with this glare from the canal. Not that I manage much better when it's good. I don't get on with you, Don Ippolito. There are too many of you. I shouldn't have known you in the procession yesterday."

Don Ippolito did not respond. He rose
and went toward his portrait on the easel, and examined it long, with a curious minuteness. Then he returned to his chair, and continued to look at it. "I suppose that it resembles me a great deal," he said, "and yet I do not feel like that. I hardly know what is the fault. It is as I should be if I were like other priests, perhaps?"

"I know it's not good," said the painter. "It is conventional, in spite of everything. But here's that first sketch I made of you."

He took up a canvas facing the wall, and set it on the easel. The character in this charcoal sketch was vastly sincerer and sweeter.

"Ah!" said Don Ippolito, with a sigh and smile of relief, "that is immeasurably better. I wish I could speak to you, dear friend, in a mood of yours as sympathetic as this picture records, of some matters that concern me very nearly. I have just come from the railroad station."

"Seeing some friends off?" asked the painter, indifferently, hovering near the sketch with a bit of charcoal in his hand, and hesitating whether to give it a certain touch. He glanced with half-shut eyes at the priest.
Don Ippolito sighed again. "I hardly know. I was seeing off my hopes, my desires, my prayers, that followed the train to America!"

The painter put down his charcoal, dusted his fingers, and looked at the priest without saying anything.

"Do you remember when I first came to you?" asked Don Ippolito.

"Certainly," said Ferris. "Is it of that matter you want to speak to me? I'm very sorry to hear it, for I don't think it practical."

"Practical, practical!" cried the priest hotly. "Nothing is practical till it has been tried. And why should I not go to America?"

"Because you can't get your passport, for one thing," answered the painter dryly.

"I have thought of that," rejoined Don Ippolito more patiently. "I can get a passport for France from the Austrian authorities here, and at Milan there must be ways in which I could change it for one from my own king"—it was by this title that patriotic Venetians of those days spoke of Victor Emmanuel—"that would carry me out of France into England."

Ferris pondered a moment. "That is quite true," he said. "Why hadn't you
thought of that when you first came to me?"

"I cannot tell. I didn't know that I could even get a passport for France till the other day."

Both were silent while the painter filled his pipe. "Well," he said presently, "I'm very sorry. I'm afraid you're dooming yourself to many bitter disappointments in going to America. What do you expect to do there?"

"Why, with my inventions"—

"I suppose," interrupted the other, putting a lighted match to his pipe, "that a painter must be a very poor sort of American: his first thought is of coming to Italy. So I know very little directly about the fortunes of my inventive fellow-countrymen, or whether an inventor has any prospect of making a living. But once when I was at Washington I went into the Patent Office, where the models of the inventions are deposited; the building is about as large as the Ducal Palace, and it is full of them. The people there told me nothing was commoner than for the same invention to be repeated over and over again by different inventors. Some few succeed, and then they have lawsuits with the infringers of
their patents; some sell out their inventions for a trifle to companies that have capital, and that grow rich upon them, the great number can never bring their ideas to the public notice at all. You can judge for yourself what your chances would be. You have asked me why you should not go to America. Well, because I think you would starve there."

"I am used to that," said Don Ippolito; "and besides, until some of my inventions became known, I could give lessons in Italian."

"Oh, bravo!" said Ferris, "you prefer instant death, then?"

"But madamigella seemed to believe that my success as an inventor would be assured there."

Ferris gave a very ironical laugh. "Miss Vervain must have been about twelve years old when she left America. Even a lady's knowledge of business, at that age, is limited. When did you talk with her about it? You had not spoken of it to me, of late, and I thought you were more contented than you used to be."

"It is true," said the priest. "Sometimes within the last two months I have almost forgotten it."
"And what has brought it so forcibly to your mind again?"

"That is what I so greatly desire to tell you," replied Don Ippolito, with an appealing look at the painter's face. He moistened his parched lips a little, waiting for further question from the painter, to whom he seemed a man fevered by some strong emotion, and at that moment not quite wholesome. Ferris did not speak, and Don Ippolito began again: "Even though I have not said so in words to you, dear friend, has it not appeared to you that I have no heart in my vocation?"

"Yes, I have sometimes fancied that. I had no right to ask you why."

"Some day I will tell you, when I have the courage to go all over it again. It is partly my own fault, but it is more my miserable fortune. But wherever the wrong lies, it has at last become intolerable to me. I cannot endure it any longer and live. I must go away, I must fly from it."

Ferris shrank from him a little, as men instinctively do from one who has set himself upon some desperate attempt. "Do you mean, Don Ippolito, that you are going to renounce your priesthood?"

Don Ippolito opened his hands and let
his priesthood drop, as it were, to the ground.

"You never spoke of this before, when you talked of going to America. Though, to be sure"—

"Yes, yes!" replied Don Ippolito with vehemence, "but now an angel has appeared and shown me the blackness of my life!"

Ferris began to wonder if he or Don Ippolito were not perhaps mad.

"An angel, yes," the priest went on, rising from his chair, "an angel whose immaculate truth has mirrored my falsehood in all its vileness and distortion—to whom, if it destroys me, I cannot devote less than a truthfulness like hers!"

"Hers—hers?" cried the painter, with a sudden pang. "Whose? Don't speak in these riddles. Whom do you mean?"

"Whom can I mean but only one?—madamigella!"

"Miss Vervain? Do you mean to say that Miss Vervain has advised you to renounce your priesthood?"

"In as many words she has bidden me forsake it at any risk,—at the cost of kindred, friends, good fame, country, everything!"
A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

The painter passed his hand confusedly over his face. These were his own words, the words he had used in speaking with Florida of the supposed sceptical priest. He grew very pale. "May I ask," he demanded in a hard, dry voice, "how she came to advise such a step?"

"I can hardly tell. Something had already moved her to learn from me the story of my life—to know that I was a man with neither faith nor hope. Her pure heart was torn by the thought of my wrong and of my error. I had never seen myself in such deformity as she saw me even when she used me with that divine compassion. I was almost glad to be what I was because of her angelic pity for me!"

The tears sprang to Don Ippolito's eyes, but Ferris asked in the same tone as before, "Was it then that she bade you be no longer a priest?"

"No, not then," patiently replied the other; "she was too greatly overwhelmed with my calamity to think of any cure for it. To-day it was that she uttered those words—words which I shall never forget, which will support and comfort me, whatever happens!"

The painter was biting hard upon the
stem of his pipe. He turned away and began ordering the colour-tubes and pencils on a table against the wall, putting them close together in very neat, straight rows. Presently he said: "Perhaps Miss Vervain also advised you to go to America?"

"Yes," answered the priest reverently. "She had thought of everything. She has promised me a refuge under her mother's roof there, until I can make my inventions known; and I shall follow them at once."

"Follow them?"

"They are going, she told me. Madama does not grow better. They are homesick. They—but you must know all this already?"

"Oh, not at all, not at all," said the painter with a very bitter smile. "You are telling me news. Pray go on."

"There is no more. She made me promise to come to you and listen to your advice before I took any step. I must not trust to her alone, she said; but if I took this step, then through whatever happened she would be my friend. Ah, dear friend, may I speak to you of the hope that these words gave me? You have seen—have you not?—you must have seen that—"

The priest faltered, and Ferris stared at him helpless. When the next words came
he could not find any strangeness in the fact which yet gave him so great a shock. He found that to his nether consciousness it had been long familiar—ever since that day when he had first jestingly proposed Don Ippolito as Miss Vervain’s teacher. Grotesque, tragic, impossible—it had still been the under-current of all his reveries; or so now it seemed to have been.

Don Ippolito anxiously drew nearer to him and laid an imploring touch upon his arm,—“I love her!”


“Priest! priest!” cried Don Ippolito, violently. “From this day I am no longer a priest! From this hour I am a man, and I can offer her the honourable love of a man—the truth of a most sacred marriage, and fidelity to death!”

Ferris made no answer. He began to look very coldly and haughtily at Don Ippolito, whose heat died away under his stare, and who at last met it with a glance of tremulous perplexity. His hand had dropped from Ferris’s arm, and he now moved some steps from him. “What is it, dear friend?” he besought him. “Is there something that offends you? I came to you
for counsel, and you meet me with a repulse little short of enmity. I do not understand. Do I intend anything wrong without knowing it? Oh, I conjure you to speak plainly!"

"Wait! Wait a minute," said Ferris, waving his hand like a man tormented by a passing pain. "I am trying to think. What you say is—I cannot imagine it!"

"Not imagine it? Not imagine it? And why? Is she not beautiful?"

"Yes."

"And good?"

"Without doubt."

"And young, and yet wise beyond her years? And true, and yet angelically kind?"

"It is all as you say, God knows. But—a priest—"

"Oh! Always that accursed word! And at heart, what is a priest, then, but a man?—a wretched, masked, imprisoned, banished man! Has he not blood and nerves like you? Has he not eyes to see what is fair, and ears to hear what is sweet? Can he live near so divine a flower and not know her grace, not inhale the fragrance of her soul, not adore her beauty? Oh, great God! And if at last he would tear off his stifling
mask, escape from his prison, return from his exile, would you gainsay him?"

"No!" said the painter, with a kind of groan. He sat down in a tall, carven gothic chair,—the furniture of one of his pictures,—and rested his head against its high back, and looked at the priest across the room. "Excuse me," he continued with a strong effort. "I am ready to befriend you to the utmost of my power. What was it you wanted to ask me? I have told you truly what I thought of your scheme of going to America; but I may very well be mistaken. Was it about that Miss Vervain desired you to consult me?" His voice and manner hardened again in spite of him. "Or did she wish me to advise you about the renunciation of your priesthood? You must have thought that carefully over for yourself."

"Yes, I do not think you could make me see that as a greater difficulty than it has appeared to me." He paused with a confused and daunted air, as if some important point had slipped his mind. "But I must take the step; the burden of the double part I play is unendurable, is it not?"

"You know better than I."

"But if you were such a man as I, with
neither love for your vocation nor faith in it, should you not cease to be a priest?"

"If you ask me in that way,—yes," answered the painter. "But I advise you nothing. I could not counsel another in such a case."

"But you think and feel as I do," said the priest, "and I am right, then."

"I do not say you are wrong."

Ferris was silent while Don Ippolito moved up and down the room, with his sliding step, like some tall, gaunt, unhappy girl. Neither could put an end to this interview, so full of intangible, inconclusive misery. Ferris drew a long breath, and then said steadily, "Don Ippolito, I suppose you did not speak idly to me of your—your feeling for Miss Vervain, and that I may speak plainly to you in return."

"Surely," answered the priest, pausing in his walk and fixing his eyes upon the painter. "It was to you as the friend of both that I spoke of my love, and my hope,—which is oftener my despair."

"Then you have not much reason to believe that she returns your—feeling?"

"Ah, how could she consciously return it? I have been hitherto a priest to her, and the thought of me would have been
impurity. But hereafter, if I can prove myself a man, if I can win my place in the world—Nc, even now, why should she care so much for my escape from these bonds, if she did not care for me more than she knew?"

"Have you ever thought of that extravagant generosity of Miss Vervain's character?"

"It is divine!"

"Has it seemed to you that if such a woman knew herself to have once wrongly given you pain, her atonement might be as headlong and excessive as her offence? That she could have no reserves in her reparation?"

Don Ippolito looked at Ferris, but did not interpose.

"Miss Vervain is very religious in her way, and she is truth itself. Are you sure that it is not concern for what seems to her your terrible position, that has made her show so much anxiety on your account?"

"Do I not know that well? Have I not felt the balm of her most heavenly pity?"

"And may she not be only trying to appeal to something in you as high as the impulse of her own heart?"

"As high!" cried Don Ippolito, almost angrily. "Can there be any higher thing
in heaven or on earth than love for such a woman?"

"Yes; both in heaven and on earth," answered Ferris.

"I do not understand you," said Don Ippolito, with a puzzled stare.

Ferris did not reply. He fell into a dull reverie in which he seemed to forget Don Ippolito and the whole affair. At last the priest spoke again: "Have you nothing to say to me, signore?"

"I? What is there to say?" returned the other blankly.

"Do you know any reason why I should not love her, save that I am—have been—a priest?"

"No, I know none," said the painter, wearily.

"Ah," exclaimed Don Ippolito, "there is something on your mind that you will not speak. I beseech you not to let me go wrong. I love her so well that I would rather die than let my love offend her. I am a man with the passions and hopes of a man, but without a man's experience, or a man's knowledge of what is just and right in these relations. If you can be my friend in this so far as to advise or warn me; if you can be her friend"—
Ferris abruptly rose and went to his balcony, and looked out upon the Grand Canal. The time-stained palace opposite had not changed in the last half-hour. As on many another summer day, he saw the black boats going by. A heavy high-pointed barge from the Silo, with the captain's family at dinner in the shade of a matting on the roof, moved sluggishly down the middle current. A party of Americans in a gondola, with their opera-glasses and guide-books in their hands, pointed out to each other the cage on the consular arms. They were all like sights in a mirror, or things in a world turned upside down.

Ferris came back and looked dizzily at the priest, trying to believe that this unhuman, sacerdotal phantasm had been telling him that it loved a beautiful young girl of his own race, faith, and language.

"Will you not answer me, signore?" meekly demanded Don Ippolito.

"In this matter," replied the painter, "I cannot advise or warn you. The whole affair is beyond my conception. I mean no unkindness, but I cannot consult with you about it. There are reasons why I should not. The mother of Miss Vervain is here
with her, and I do not feel that her interests in such a matter are in my hands. If they come to me for help, that is different. What do you wish? You tell me that you are resolved to renounce the priesthood and go to America; and I have answered you to the best of my power. You tell me that you are in love with Miss Vervain. What can I have to say about that?"

Don Ippolito stood listening with a patient, and then a wounded air. "Nothing," he answered proudly. "I ask your pardon for troubling you with my affairs. Your former kindness emboldened me too much. I shall not trespass again. It was my ignorance, which I pray you to excuse. I take my leave, signore."

He bowed, and moved out of the room, and a dull remorse filled the painter, as he heard the outer door close after him. But he could do nothing. If he had given a wound to the heart that trusted him, it was in an anguish which he had not been able to master, and whose causes he could not yet define. It was all a shapeless torment, it held him like the memory of some hideous nightmare prolonging its horror beyond sleep. It seemed impossible that what had happened should have happened.
It was long, as he sat in the chair from which he had talked with Don Ippolito, before he could reason about what had been said; and then the worst phase presented itself first. He could not help seeing that the priest might have found cause for hope in the girl's behaviour toward him. Her violent resentments, and her equally violent repentances; her fervent interest in his unhappy fortunes, and her anxiety that he should at once forsake the priesthood; her urging him to go to America, and her promising him a home under her mother's roof there: why might it not all be in fact a proof of her tenderness for him? She might have found it necessary to be thus coarsely explicit with him, for a man in Don Ippolito's relation to her could not otherwise have imagined her interest in him. But her making use of Ferris to confirm her own purposes by his words, her repeating them so that they should come back to him from Don Ippolito's lips, her letting another man go with her to look upon the procession in which her priestly lover was to appear in his sacerdotal panoply; these things could not be accounted for except by that strain of insolent, passionate defiance which he had noted in her from the beginning. Why should she first tell Don
Ippolito of their going away? "Well, I wish him joy of his bargain," said Ferris aloud, and rising, shrugged his shoulders, and tried to cast off all care of a matter that did not concern him. But one does not so easily cast off a matter that does not concern one. He found himself haunted by certain tones and looks and attitudes of the young girl, wholly alien to the character he had just constructed for her. They were child-like, trusting, unconscious, far beyond anything he had yet known in women, and they appealed to him now with a maddening pathos. She was standing there before Don Ippolito's picture as on that morning when she came to Ferris, looking anxiously at him, her innocent beauty, troubled with some hidden care, hallowing the place. Ferris thought of the young fellow who told him that he had spent three months in a dull German town because he had the room there that was once occupied by the girl who had refused him; the painter remembered that the young fellow said he had just read of her marriage in an American newspaper.

Why did Miss Vervain send Don Ippolito to him? Was it some scheme of her secret love for the priest; or mere coarse resentment of the cautions Ferris had once hinted,
A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

a piece of vulgar bravado? But if she had acted throughout in pure simplicity, in unwise goodness of heart? If Don Ippolito were altogether self-deceived, and nothing but her unknowing pity had given him grounds of hope? He himself had suggested this to the priest, and now with a different motive he looked at it in his own behalf. A great load began slowly to lift itself from Ferris's heart, which could ache now for this most unhappy priest. But if his conjecture were just, his duty would be different. He must not coldly acquiesce and let things take their course. He had introduced Don Ippolito to the Vervains; he was in some sort responsible for him; he must save them if possible from the painful consequences of the priest's hallucination. But how to do this was by no means clear. He blamed himself for not having been franker with Don Ippolito, and tried to make him see that the Vervains might regard his passion as a presumption upon their kindness to him, an abuse of their hospitable friendship; and yet how could he have done this without outrage to a sensitive and right-meaning soul? For a moment it seemed to him that he must seek Don Ippolito, and repair his fault; but they had hardly parted as friends,
and his action might be easily misconstrued. If he shrank from the thought of speaking to him of the matter again, it appeared yet more impossible to bring it before the Vervains. Like a man of the imaginative temperament as he was, he exaggerated the probable effect, and pictured their dismay in colours that made his interference seem a ludicrous enormity; in fact, it would have been an awkward business enough for one not hampered by his intricate obligations. He felt bound to the Vervains, the ignorant young girl, and the addle-pated mother; but if he ought to go to them and tell them what he knew, to which of them ought he to speak, and how? In an anguish of perplexity that made the sweat stand in drops upon his forehead, he smiled to think it just possible that Mrs. Vervain might take the matter seriously, and wish to consider the propriety of Florida’s accepting Don Ippolito. But if he spoke to the daughter, how should he approach the subject? “Don Ippolito tells me he loves you, and he goes to America with the expectation that when he has made his fortune with a patent back-action apple-corer, you will marry him.” Should he say something to this purport? And in Heaven’s name what right had he, Ferris, to say any-