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HONOUR WITHOUT RENOWN

BY MRS. INNES-BROWN

Author of "Three Daughters of the United Kingdom"

CHAPTER XII.

The sun had ceased to pour its rays in at the little casement. They were centred now upon that side of the cottage from which no window peeped; so the small room looked more gloomy than it had done some hours previously, when with a heavy heart the Sister of Charity resumed her seat.

Alas, her heart and brain were in a turmoil of fear and alarm concerning the safety of Ma Sear and her energetic community, to say nothing of the number of others for whose welfare she trembled. Twenty-four hours more of this terrible disorder must decide the fate of Paris; in the meantime what awful accidents might not be perpetrated by its enemies, driven frantic as they would be by defeat and the fierce passions of hatred and revenge.

Almost mechanically she seated herself, and with a half-smothered sigh took up once more the neglected flannel garment, and endeavored to concentrate her attention upon her present duty and forget her anxiety.

Manfred appeared not to apprehend any danger from the riot without. He knew he was far enough removed from the scene of it to have no immediate cause for fear; besides, was not Madame Corbett well known for a rabid Revolutionist? Her cottage then, was a secure refuge. At any rate, having travelled so far in his story, he felt compelled to finish it.

"Shall I go on, Sister Marguerite?" he asked. "Are you prepared to listen?"

"Yes, yes," she answered, quickly, once more endeavoring to collect her thoughts. "You were telling me that poor Edmund committed some awful act of folly."

"Yes, he did the very worst thing that he could have done for himself and his prospects. He became a Catholic!"

"Before he married Marion?"

"Yes. And as soon as Sir Henry heard of this last misdemeanor he sent for him. There was a stormy interview. I believe the old man would have forgiven him everything—would have reinstated him gladly—had the young man but consented to relinquish Marion and this other nefarious notion. As it was he looked upon his nephew as a renegade and a disgrace to his name. And after using every argument he could think of to turn the young man from this wild folly, the old baronet lost patience and bade him choose between his uncle's love, with the Abbey lands as an inheritance, and poverty, with his new-fangled notions and Marion for his wife."

"And Marion was ensnared as conveniently near as they dared to be, overheard much of this conversation. They heard the sad pleadings of the old man and the firm and respectful, though foolish, replies of Edmund, as he assured his uncle that even should death deprive him of his Marion, yet he would never relinquish the Faith he now loved better than his life. So, nursing himself to the utmost, Sir Henry arose and, walking towards the door with a firm step but quivering heart, opened it and bade his obstinate and misguided nephew begone. The hot tears rolled down Edmund's cheeks, for he dearly loved the stern old man, as humbly he crossed for the last time the threshold of his ancestors."

"Ah, believe me," interrupted the listener, "if he still lives, Heaven will yet come to his assistance. Where is the heart that ever suffered for, and trusted in, his God and was deceived?" Then, folding her hands tightly together, she said in a low voice: "Poor Edmund, may God speedily have pity on you and aid you!"

"Amen," he muttered fervently to himself; and as if in answer to the prayer, an unfamiliar glow of charity stole over his heart and seemed to penetrate his secret soul. Yes, it was certainly easing his mind, it was doing him good, to tell her all this; surely she who was so wise, so full of resource, would be able to tell him how best to shift this weary burden from his mind, the weight of which had oftentimes well nigh overwhelmed him. After a thoughtful pause he continued:

"A year passed, and in one way and another Edmund had contrived to leave a little money. Marion's mother was dead, and her ailing father, desirous that his child should have a protector, gave his consent to an early wedding. By some unknown means the knowledge of this fact came to the ears of Sir Henry, whose health, by the way, was fast breaking up. He lived a very lonely life, and there were, I believe, hours when he blamed himself as having been too hard on Edmund's boy. A craving filled his heart to see, to be reconciled to, and bless him once more before he died. His physicians might try to hide the fact from him, but he knew too well that his days were numbered, that at any moment the weak thread of his life might snap; and what would become of the boy whom, in spite of all, he loved so well? No, they had both been punished enough; he would forgive him everything and reinstate the plucky fellow in his favor once more. But it must be done by degrees—yes, by degrees."

"Pacing the floor of his library with impatient steps he sent for the older lawyer, Thomas. A kindly smile played around the lips of the baronet that morning, his heart felt lighter than it had done for many a day. His mind was made up at last; he would restore his ill-guided but beloved nephew to favor; gradually should all be given back to the boy, even the unfortunate wife must be endured, for his sake.

"When the door opened and admitted young Thomas, instead of his father, a chill fell upon the spirits of Sir Henry. A stern expression chased the smile from his lips, while an ominous cloud of displeasure gathered on his brow; for, try as he might, he could not trust this clever son as he had ever been wont to trust the father. He turned abruptly upon the young lawyer, and sternly demanded the reason why his father had not answered his summons in person?"

"Young Thomas, bowing deferentially, explained that his father was confined to his bed with rheumatism, that he had desired him to express his sincere regret to Sir Henry, and, at the same time, to assure him that if he would confide in the business sense of his son, it should have his very best attention. There was no help for it; the kindly flame still burned in Sir Henry's heart, he would endeavor to overcome his prejudice to this young man, for the time being at least; so desiring him to be seated, he plunged his hands into his trousers pockets, and, resuming his walk, launched into a declaration of all his plans regarding the future of Edmund. He would begin by sending the dear boy a wedding present of a thousand pounds; and after the return of the young couple from their wedding trip he would invite them to the Abbey Towers for a visit of indefinite length; but this latter portion of the programme must be kept a profound secret at present; it should come upon them as a surprise just when Edmund was thinking of settling down to ill-paid drudgery again, in order to keep his wife, chuckled Sir Henry, as he rubbed his hands gleefully together.

"During the disclosure of these plans the young lawyer had gradually turned pale. During the pause which ensued he ventured, with a sickly smile, to force the inquiry: 'Am I—am we to understand, then, Sir Henry, that you are about to reinstate Mr. Edmund at the Towers, with the ultimate object of making him your sole heir?' Of course—this was just it," answered the old man testily, turning his hawk-like glance upon the crest-fallen knave; and what is more, he continued firmly, 'you can tell your father for me, I will destroy at once that bogus will which he sent to me connected with my wishes—I mean that one in which I pretended to leave everything to his half brother, Harold; tell your father to bring it here; I will destroy it myself and abide by the old one in which dear Edmund inherits everything; and Harold may look out for himself. Finding that the young lawyer made no reply, Sir Henry moved a few steps nearer to him, and demanded in no very patient tone, 'do you fully comprehend his meaning, or is it would be necessary for him to write or repeat his instructions.'

"I understand you perfectly, Sir Henry," stammered the young man, "I was not thinking that surely this will is somewhat rough upon Harold, seeing that he has been taught to believe—latterly at least—that you would do something—nay, a good deal—for him."

"Well, then, these who took upon themselves to bid him hope for what was never by any right or title his own, may comfort him now for the loss of what he never possessed. Stay one moment longer, Mr. Thomas; I will even now write a cheque for one thousand pounds on my city bank, payable to my nephew, and you shall take it to your father, who, I am sure, will forward it as a wedding present. It must reach my nephew the day after tomorrow; he will not send it directly from myself, but will wait a little and bide my time, until the first flush of billing and cooing is over. Then he will have more leisure in which to attend to his old uncle. Here is the cheque, and don't fail to tell your father about the will. I am in no immediate hurry; still, it is better to be on the safe side. However, I can trust him; he knows my ways, or ought to by this time."

"Almost staggering, young Thomas rose to depart. Were they then to lose everything, he reflected, just when all had seemed so nearly within their grasp? How pay his own pressing debts now? Edmund and his wife once installed at the Abbey Towers, little hopes of a life of ease and comfort remained for him—nothing but hard work and small pay to look forward to. Was there nothing that could be done to lower Edmund once more in Sir Henry's eyes? Was all their past strategy to be thrown to the winds? Surely it would not take much to make the old gentleman lose confidence in his nephew again! Something must be done, and that at once, if they were to frustrate this mad scheme of Sir Henry's. At any rate, there was little to lose by the stroke, and much, much to gain! The old baronet's life was worth little now; a severe shock might make him change more than his mind. Oh, Sister Marguerite!" cried Manfred, stretching out his arm imploringly towards her, "believe me when I assure you that Harold knew not all this, nor

the following facts, until they were accomplished. Thomas urged him to go to France on some imaginary business for himself, but in reality that he might be out of the way. When he returned he found himself a prosecutor under Sir Henry's will—so, at least, it was represented to him.

"And he tried to believe it no doubt? But tell me, for I do not understand things rightly, did Edmund return to the Towers?"

"Never. But how can I explain it all to you? Briefly this is what occurred: between the time of Edmund's receiving the cheque—which arrived upon the morning of the marriage—and the day on which he presented it at the bank, to be cashed and paid over to his account, the cheque had been tampered with. When Edmund handed it in it was for the sum of ten thousand pounds instead of one thousand, which was a decided overdraw on Sir Henry's account. The cheque was duly forwarded to him to confirm; and when he beheld it, the deceit which he believed to have been practised upon him by his nephew came upon him with such force that his remaining strength gave way, he lost consciousness, and never really recovered it for the two days that he lingered. But Thomas the younger made hay while he might. For two hours he was cleft with the old baronet on the day of his death, to resolve, it was supposed, his last instructions; and when at last he issued with a paper which certainly bore the feeble signature of the baronet, the contents of which meant worse than death to Edmund. It stated that Sir Henry believed his nephew to have committed forgery by tampering with the cheque, and that he desired that Harold should succeed to the title and estates. Furthermore, that the base conduct of Edmund should be taken up by the law, and treated as it deserved to be. How can I ever tell you how it all came about? Everything seemed left in the hands of the lawyers, the elder of whom was brought to believe that the young man was not guilty of the crime, but was the indirect cause also of his poor uncle's death. He did not spare him, you may be sure of that."

"Did they seize him?" inquired the Sister, almost below her breath.

"They did, just as he and his bride of two days were taking their tickets for the Continent, where they purposed spending the remainder of their honeymoon."

"But why did not Edmund notice that the cheque had been altered before it was presented for payment?"

"He was always too careless about money matters; he swore, when questioned, that he had never touched or looked at it again from the time he received it to the moment it was handed in to the bank, and yet to his knowledge it had never left his possession."

"Was there no one to come forward and plead his cause, and try to prove his innocence?"

"Yes, Mr. McDermot employed a clever counsel, and easily impoverished himself in his endeavour to save the name of his daughter's husband, from shame and ignominy. But it was all of no avail: the case for the prosecution was unusually clear; every doubtful act in the young man's former life was raked up and exposed; the bogus will was read, and it, together with Sir Henry's sad and sudden death, and the basis of his uncle's displeasure under which he was supposed to have lived—these, and a hundred other things, all told against him; his case was hopeless. Besides his health and spirits gave way; and breaking down altogether, he was completely unable to defend himself."

"And so was unjustly condemned by both his friends and his country—for he certainly never altered the cheque?"

"Yes, he lost all his earthly possessions; his wife, his good name; and received in return a sentence of five years' penal servitude."

"My God!" exclaimed Sister Marguerite, rising abruptly, "he is perhaps suffering still! Is this unjust sentence not yet completed? And you—you live to say it? You who know in your inmost heart that he always was innocent of this charge! Oh, how can you bear to lie there and realize what he must now, even in this very moment, be enduring, alone, isolated from his equals and those whom he loves, and treated by those beneath him as a felon—his youthful frame, perhaps, bent and weakened by cruel labour; his brow bowed in shame and branded with the stigma of dishonour; his kind heart crushed, nay, it may be, broken long ago, by months and years spent in weary waiting! Why do you not rise and rescue him? If you would hope for mercy yourself, hasten to save him!"

"She paced the small apartment with quick and nervous steps, and gasped though for freer air. Then, turning suddenly upon him, she asked quickly:

"Where is this Harold—this shameless coward in whose heart lies still this terrible secret? Why does he not come forward and confront that villain Thomas and vindicate the honour of his brother's name?"

"Alas, how can he do it? The old lawyer and his son have both gone to their account. I assure you, indeed, that it was not until just before the death of the latter that Harold learned the full truth of all these facts—that young Thomas himself had done the dishonourable act,

but, for reasons of his own, upon poor Edmund's ruin."

"Then, having learnt that, why did not Harold at once stand forth and proclaim his brother's innocence?"

"Oh, be merciful in your judgments, Sister Marguerite. How could he do so?" demanded Manfred in tones of bitterness. Can you not understand that Thomas had so managed the affair that to clear Edmund's name meant to implicate his brother's? Both could not be free. If Harold dared to make the attempt, overwhelming evidence was there to implicate and condemn himself. What could he do but let things drift? Three years are already over, and Harold will blame his brother, by rendering him every possible assistance on his release from—"

"Alone!"—and with ringing scorn the word echoed through the room—"alone! Oh, base the heart to conceive the thought; and bolder still the lips to frame it! Alone! How can he stone to his innocent brother for the unnumbered wrongs he has wrought against him? How heal the sickening pain of those weary hours, days, and months spent in a felon's cell? How can he restore the fair name and build up once more the health and strength the manly form bowed down by meagre fare and cruel work? How dry the bitter tears from the girl's heart, or bid her cease to weep and mourn for her husband's sufferings and his tarnished name? No, 'tis cowardly to breathe the word in that sense. Atone! must be atoned even as was the injury—publicly—freely! If not, believe me, the hour of Harold's retribution will arrive; he cannot escape his punishment. Either here or hereafter it will overtake him; then may God have pity upon him!"

"She looked down upon him, the fire of indignation lighting her eyes. Writhing in agony of soul, and cringing in terror, Manfred gasped:

"In mercy to poor Harold, say that there is hope for him yet. He had not enjoyed his ill-gotten goods—indeed he has not! Wealth has not been his, for blackmailers have well-nigh ruined him. And as for happiness or peace of heart—God is my witness, he has never known them."

All feeling of pain in his injured limb seemed forgotten in the mental torture he was then enduring. His lips quivered and his hands shook with misery as he endeavored to clutch the nun's hands; as though the very contact with her would ensure for him the peace and safety he craved. But instinctively she raised them; in her agitation she had caught up her rosary beads and, without intention, had backed further from his reach. He noted the movement and caught the ring of the prayer beads as she answered:

"Heaven and earth must bear witness to the sincerity of Harold's repentance, ere I can find mercy. Carried away by the vehemence of her nature, she had miscalculated his strength, not taken into account the effect that all this agitation might have upon his frame, weakened by illness. Before her mental vision had risen the tear-stained, suffering face of Marion MacDermot, as she had poured forth this terrible story into the kind nun's sympathetic ear, and her heart burnt with indignation at the thought that here before her lay the accomplice, of all that misery and pain which had befallen her and further the hand-mover from him. Then, as if all hope had departed from him for ever as if the doom of despair, let loose, had overwhelmed him, Manfred turned, and with a groan fainted away."

With a startled cry the little Sister of Charity sprang to the side of her patient. She realized the full danger of the situation. She had been too hasty, too stern, towards her, when he had crept before her, when he had fallen creature before her hands.

"My God, forgive me!" she cried as, falling upon her knees, she bowed her pale face in her hands and prayed. Alas, who was she that dared to sit in judgment upon a fellow-creature? What roughness of humility did she not yet need to subdue that proud spirit and calm the fiery impulses to her nature! Would death but find her still a victim, never a conqueror? "Heaven forgive me," she cried again, "and sweet Mother of God come to mine aid!"

But she must work and pray together. Seizing Manfred's clammy hand—her own were trembling visibly—she eagerly felt his pulse. There was hope yet; he might revive. Tenderly she bathed the weary temples, chafed the wasted hands, and forced drops of a powerful restorative between the lips.

"Sister Marguerite! Sister Marguerite!" rang out the shrill voice of Madame Corbett from the adjoining apartment. "hear you not rescue him? My old spirit is stirred and warms within me at the sound of war. We shall be conquerors yet! I know it well. The Reds are to the fore!"

"Yes, yes; I hear—God help them all," answered the agitated Sister. Little heed she now all the noise without; but one thought, one fear, was in her mind. Had she unwittingly frustrated the presence of the despising fellow-creature before the dread Tribunal? How she racked her brain in the endeavour to discover some remedy that perchance in her excitement she had omitted. Her life would be but a small ransom to offer in exchange for his soul; and how gladly would she make the sacrifice! If only Heaven would restore him to life, how she would speak to him of the goodness and

mercy of God, and endeavour to win him to repentance.

And Heaven was kind to her. TO BE CONTINUED

LOCAL COLOR

Mr. Copeland read and reread the last three pages of the manuscript of his novel, "The Way of the World," made one or two corrections, and laid it on the mahogany desk before him. He knew that it was by far the best thing he had done, better, even, than he had hoped ever to do. Mr. Barton, junior partner of the publishing house of Doan and Company, had already read the first five chapters and had offered a princely sum for the copyright, enthusiastically predicting that it would be a "best seller," not only in the United States, but in England as well.

So, after Mr. Copeland gave the manuscript its last touches, he leaned back in his big chair, well content, and thought disjunctively of his swift rise to fame and fortune, and of this newest, boldest bid for both.

The fact was that "The Way of the World" was a bitter and very clever attack on the Catholic Church, her priests, and nuns, and institutions; and the whole sordid coated by a plot of sustained interest, delicate humor, and a pathos that was both very human and very tender. The scene of two or three of the concluding chapters was laid in a Catholic hospital, under the care of Franciscan nuns. There was an institution of the kind in the city, not much more than half a mile from Mr. Copeland's apartment, and to obtain his local color he had formed a habit of seeking out a shady corner of the garden behind the main building, where, book in hand, he had watched and listened throughout the long hours of many a summer afternoon. There had passed in panorama before him the patients who were able to creep up and down the balcony or to pace the garden walk; four or five stiff-jointed old men, such as do the outdoor work about all charity institutions; a score of Sisters, always busy and often laughing; the old chaplain, visiting priests, and even the Bishop himself.

No one had ever questioned his right to be there, or paid much attention to him, except that, one very hot afternoon, stout old Sister Mercedes, who cared for the chickens, had brought him a glass of warm and rather weak lemonade, little dreaming that a caricature of her already figured in a half finished novel, which lay in a locked drawer less than a mile away, or that the little courtesy she meant so kindly up for him, would be made laughable and held against him for ridicule. Nor could she have imagined that any one would dare to display for the laughter of a laughing-lover and irreverent public their fatherly chaplain—very feeble, it is true, very slow, a little deaf, a little slovenly in his dress, very absent-minded, and much given to talking to himself—or was it to Our Lord?—as he made his slow way in and out.

As he sat looking at the pile of typewritten sheets, Mr. Copeland thought proudly of the story itself, of his cleverness in quietly obtaining the money he needed, and lastly of the appearance of the novel, which he had already figured in a half finished novel, which lay in a locked drawer less than a mile away, or that the little courtesy she meant so kindly up for him, would be made laughable and held against him for ridicule. Nor could she have imagined that any one would dare to display for the laughter of a laughing-lover and irreverent public their fatherly chaplain—very feeble, it is true, very slow, a little deaf, a little slovenly in his dress, very absent-minded, and much given to talking to himself—or was it to Our Lord?—as he made his slow way in and out.

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