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FANNY MORELAND;

OR, USE AND ABUSE OF THE RISIBLES.

By Miss Catherine E. Beecher.

There are some very peculiar characters in the world, who seem to carry with them and around them an atmosphere of fun. Wherever they go, something amusing is sure to occur. Never any thing ludicrous can happen for miles around, but they are sure to be there. While thousands of others can go the same road, and visit the same places, year after year, and never a thing occurs to start even a smile,—no sooner do these favourites of Momus appear, than man and beast, nature and art, all seem jostled into some new and comical arrangement for their special edification and amusement. It is true, that in accounting for this peculiarity, some assert that such persons have such a love of humour, and such a quick perception of the ludicrous as enables them to detect what would escape less searching glances. Others have insinuated, that a little elf of exaggeration always aids to spin a web of fairy work about their adventures and rehearsals; while others maliciously declare, that, bent on discovering what they so much love, when they cannot meet it ready made, they scruple not to secure it by wholesale manufacture.

Whatever may be the philosophy of the case, it certainly is a fact that there are such persons in the world; and it is just as much a fact that Fanny Moreland was one of their number. Fanny was not handsome—she was not witty—she was not learned—she was not rich—nor was she particularly useful; and yet she was a universal favourite. Wherever she went she seemed to carry sunshine, and to give a new spring to every body's spirits. She had an airy, graceful figure, a pretty little hand and foot, quick and sprightly movements; a stealthy, roguish smile, and a perking sort of whisk with her head, that altogether made one think of a frolicsome little kitten. Fanny was always finding something that was "so funny," that she must run and tell somebody of it; and she had such a joyous and comical way of rehearsing the matter, that the listener was half done laughing before she had half finished the story. Had it not been that Fanny possessed an unusual share of good common sense, she certainly would have been spoiled; for never were parents so at their wit's end to know what to do with a creature, as were hers. It was impossible for them to reprove her as they did their other children. She always had some such comical apology, or such a laughable way of acknowledging her faults, and was so really amiable and unwilling to offend, that no one could look her in the face, and feel displeased long enough to administer a serious reproof.

Her sports and pranks at school, as well as at home, were without number, for her invention was endless, and her activity untiring. But too kind in heart ever intentionally to wound the feelings of others, and professing a native refinement that saved her from *hoidenisms*, though she often interfered with the order both of the family and the school, she was oftener let off with smiles than with frowns. At school she was the universal favourite, the leader in all sports, the plotter of all tricks, the author of many a merry prank; and it was from her teacher she received the compliment of being "for ever busy in doing nothing," and the familiar appellative of Fanny Frisk.

Among their family relatives was an uncle of Fanny's mother, of whom the elder children often spoke, but whom Fanny had never seen. She had heard of Uncle Enoch how good he was, and how solemn, and how strict; and when it was rumoured that Uncle Enoch was coming to make them a visit, Fanny was often admonished after this fashion: "Well, Miss Fan, when Uncle Enoch comes, you will not dare do such tricks before him," "I should like to know what Uncle Enoch will say to you when he comes."

Now Fanny had a sort of intrepid spirit, that was rather stimulated than daunted by difficulties, and she generally listened to such remarks with a sly sort of a look, and a twinkle in her eye, which showed that she felt no little curiosity to see this solemn uncle, who was to frighten her into sobriety; and a sort of suspicion that she should somehow contrive to slip through his fingers, if he should try to take her in hand.

At length the time arrived, and it was announced to Fanny that Uncle Enoch was come. Down went her little garden hoe, and in she run. At first she took a peep at him through a long window that opened into the verandah. There sat Uncle Enoch—a long, lank figure—bolt upright in his chair; his feet placed side by side, in exactly parallel lines; his knees both bent at exactly the same angle; his shoulders square, and his hands laid in exactly the same position before him. His face was sallow, and strongly marked; his cheeks were somewhat sunken; and his mouth had that appearance of compression that indicates firmness and resolution. Huge, dark, bushy eyebrows hung from his forehead, and his eyes were entirely concealed by a pair of large, round, green glasses, with thick, black, tortoise rims, which added an owl-like expression to the forbidding aspect of his other features. The first glance sent a solemn look across Fanny's face, from very sympathy; and she turned off with a puzzled sort of look as if she was quite at a loss to know how to approach such a personage. Soon, however, she was seen gliding around in the back part of the parlour, where Uncle Enoch sat talking, in slow and solemn tones, with her mother. Fanny seemed listening, and watching, and peering about, like a kitten who spies the house mastiff, and almost, but does not quite, dare to venture on a spring at him. At length her mother spied her, and calling her up, presented her to Uncle Enoch, as the infant she once brought to his house. Uncle Enoch looked at her with a long, steady look, through his great green glasses, and then extended his hand towards her. Fanny slowly drew up to him and gave him her hand; and then, in reply to his deliberate question if she was "pretty well," gave a simple "Yes, sir," and vanished away. Soon, however, she returned to the charge, and kept around, listening to his remarks, and drawing nearer and nearer to his seat. She remained silent through the hour of tea, and in the evening scarcely made a remark. At length, however, her mother sent her for the bootjack and slippers, and while aiding in the operation, she adventured one or two sprightly remarks, which she fancied made the muscles move a little towards a smile around Uncle Enoch's mouth. She then ran for her father's loose gown; and with great volubility succeeded in persuading him to take off his thick coat, and sit in the easy chair.

By this time the old gentleman and Fanny were on quite easy terms. Then, as if it were a matter of course, yet in a roguish sort of way, she invited him to "take off his great green glasses." It was said in the same style as she had asked him to take off his greatcoat and hat. At this sally the muscles of Uncle Enoch's face were all relaxed; he turned and looked down upon her with a surprised and wondering look, and yet with a manifest and most benignant smile. Fanny looked up in his face with one of her most comical glances, and, lifting her hands with a sort of imploring air, she fairly pulled the glasses from his face. Behind them appeared a pair of mild and dark, yet kindly beaming eyes; and all his features seemed so entirely changed, that Fanny gave a jump of real joy, hid the glasses behind her, and ran off, declaring that the wicked things should never again hide her from such kind and pleasant eyes.

What human being was ever proof against the united charms of kindness, flattery, and fun! Fanny had passed the Rubicon—had won the day; and, after this, Uncle Enoch never seemed better pleased than when Fanny was flitting about him. It was all novelty to him. Nobody before had ever dared to invade his dignity in that style; and, though he seemed greatly puzzled, and sometimes a little troubled, he certainly was wonderfully pleased. It was a most amusing sight to witness Fanny, skipping about his path, or hanging on his arm, chatting about any thing and every thing, telling him about this, that and the other thing, and seeming as comfortable and chatty with him as she was with every body else.

Uncle Enoch did not approve of levity; he thought it very wrong to indulge in idle laughter. He was troubled to see his little favourite so thoughtless and so forgetful of the solemn duties of religion, and of every thing he deemed serious and important. He would often begin to talk seriously with her about flightiness, and about her duties to God and man; but somehow she would always contrive to slip off into something else, so that the old gentleman seemed all the time puzzled and pleased, anxious and delighted, and at the end would sigh and say, he "could not make any thing of the child, and he was afraid nothing could, unless it was the grace of the Lord."

As time passed on, Fanny and Uncle Enoch continued warm friends; and, at his earnest solicitation, she once went to spend a fortnight in the retired and primitive village where he ministered as pastor. Here Fanny found so many odd contrivances, so many queer looking people, so many new and comical matters of one sort and another, that she was constantly amused herself, and constantly amusing all around; though she continued to do it without hurting the feelings of any one. But the old gentleman seemed to grow more and more discouraged at the prospect of ever doing her any good. And yet, when the time came for him to part with her, it was with tears in his eyes, and for the whole day he wandered about uneasy and restless, as if a dark cloud had shut out the sunshine of life. But it was not the charm of her society alone that he felt, and of which he lamented the loss. He bore her on his heart as a wandering lamb; far from the fold of safety, for whose eternal interest he trembled, for whose spiritual welfare he daily prayed. And a time came when those prayers were answered—when that wild and joyous spirit, which for years had skimmed like a butterfly over the surface of this world's charms, forgetful of its glorious origin, its noblest capacities, its immortal destinies,—was brought under the influence of those solemn truths of religion, which alone can control and regulate the disordered powers of the human mind. Such a change, in such a mind, could not long be a matter of concealment in a family where religion was first, and all other concerns were regarded as minor and subordinate. Uncle Enoch soon became a sharer in their hopes and gratitude; and, month after month, so urgent and repeated were his entreaties for another visit, that neither child nor parents could withhold consent.

But why was it that Fanny, who in the days of her worldliness did not hesitate, was so slow and apparently so unwilling to meet her pious and joyful old friend, when her most sacred sympathies were all in unison with his? It was the evening previous to her departure that her father found her alone and in tears.

"What is it that troubles you, my child?" said he.

"Father, I dread this visit to Uncle Enoch."

"Dread this visit! What can be the reason?"

"Oh, father, I am not what Uncle Enoch expects me to be. I know I cannot keep my spirits from overflowing. Religion has made me happier than ever I was before, and it is a sober and rational sort of happiness; but it does not make me quiet, and sedate, and solemn, as Uncle Enoch will expect to find me, and I am afraid it never will."

"Well, my child, I do not think it ever will; and I do not think you need to distress yourself if it does not."

Mr. Moreland was a wise man, who had seen much of the world, and much of human nature; and he was an intelligent, refined, and Christian gentleman. The difficulty which troubled his daughter was one that had occupied his own speculations, and he took this opportunity to communicate more definite views to her mind than she herself could command.

"Do you suppose, my child," said he, as he drew her on his knee, "that it is wrong to be amused or to laugh at what is ludicrous?"

"No, father, it cannot always be wrong, for sometimes it is out of our power to refrain. For instance, yesterday, when old Mr. Banks made such a sad mistake at table, and then looked so frightened, and made such queer grimaces, and such an odd apology, I could no more help laughing than I could help breathing, for I am sure I tried my utmost to refrain, both for his sake and my own."

"True, my child, and therefore we are certain that sometimes it must be right to use the risible faculties which God has implanted, in circumstances where they inevitably will be called into exercise. In addition to this, we find that there is a great love of what is calculated to [illegible]ite these susceptibilities. There is nothing men like b[illegible] to be made to laugh, and whoever affords them this gra[illegible]on will always be a favourite, especially if it is done in an innocent and lawful manner. We also find great constitutional differences in mankind, as it respects the love of the ludicrous, and the power of appreciating wit and humour. There are also great differences as to the flow of animal spirits. Some are habitually cheerful and equable; others are phlegmatic, and prone to seriousness or even melancholy. What a difference we find in our own family. Your brother Frederick, from very infancy, how reflective, sedate, and almost melancholy; you are as much in the other extreme; while Mary, so equable and serene, is just half way between. Now, did you expect that religion would change these constitutional peculiarities, and make you such a character as your brother Frederick?"

Why, father, I had no very definite view on the subject; but I perceive that I ought not to expect it."

"I think," continued Mr. Moreland, "that in estimating religious character, too little regard is paid to constitutional peculiarities; and that a serious countenance, and quiet and contemplative habits, have taken a place as evidences of religious character, which is not exactly correct. Religion certainly tends to make us more serious, rational and contemplative than if it did not exist; but it does not tend to destroy the peculiarities of nature; nor are we to expect that all consistently pious persons will be of a serious