

## XXIX.

## FERNANDO WOOD.

HIS START.—HIS PIOUS ROLE.—THE INAUGURAL.—HE WINS OVER THE PUBLIC.—ASSUMES HIS REAL CHARACTER.—PERSONAL.

## HIS START.

FROM the lowest social position, Mr. Wood became Mayor of New York. When put in nomination, it was a measuring cast between the mayor's office and a convict's cell. He pleaded the statute of limitations. Had the proceedings against him commenced a few hours earlier, the statute would have been pleaded in vain. Having been the keeper of a low groggery himself, his strength lay with the desperate classes of the city. To elect himself, he appealed to the lowest of men, and to the vilest grade of New York voters. He was nominated when corruption in the city government was the most fearful. Nothing was safe. The vilest men were in power. The public finances were controlled by those whom the citizens of New York would not have trusted with a five-dollar note. The authorities and the rascals hunted in couples. The nomination of Fernando Wood deepened the gloom, and extended the feeling of general distrust. No man was ever more earnestly opposed. The newspapers were full of his

past conduct and alleged crimes. The religious press, in trumpet tones, called upon the citizens to defeat him. The pulpit lifted up its voice in prayer and alarm at the great evil that was impending over the city. By the aid of the united vote of the foreign population, the keepers of dens, brothels, and low groggeries, blended with the power of party nomination, Mr. Wood was elected.

## HIS PIOUS ROLE.

His proclamations, speeches, and promises gave the lie to the electioneering stories. He turned his back on his associates who elected him. He joined the party of reform. He promised great things. All corruption was to be checked, and economy to pervade the administration of the government. The laws in relation to dram-selling should be enforced, and the Sabbath be kept. The people in New York were entitled to the best government in the land, and they should have it. Between the election and the inaugural Mr. Wood astonished friend and foe. An omnibus proprietor sent him a season ticket. He sent it back, stating that he intended to see the laws of New York enforced, and could not be holden to any party. He saw a policeman reading a newspaper while a crowd were gathered around a fallen omnibus horse. The mayor elect asked the name of the policeman. He refused to give it, and Mr. Wood took down his number. "What do you want my name for?" the policeman said. "You are bound to give it to any one who asks, without a reason," was the reply. The name was given with evident reluctance. As Mr. Wood was

turning away, the officer said, "You have asked my name, now give me yours." "Fernando Wood is my name," said the mayor elect, "and I will see you at the City Hall on the 1st of January next." The policeman gave a long whistle, and departed. The friends of public order, of the Sabbath, of sound morals, temperance, and religion were astounded at the conduct of the new chief, and thought that the millennium was not far off.

#### THE INAUGURAL.

The proclamation with which Mr. Wood began his reign as mayor fell on the city like a bombshell. For a time the reforms promised in it were not merely in name. The police, who had for years loafed round the City Hall, surrounded by a troop of smokers, tobacco-chewers, and eaters of peanuts; bullies and blackguards, prize-fighters, pot-house politicians, who had made the City Hall their headquarters, to the disgust of decent people,—were informed that their reign was over, and that they must abdicate. On the inauguration of their favorite candidate, they were ready to congratulate him by renewing their visits to the City Hall. He was the people's candidate, and the people had elected him in spite of the aristocrats, who had tried hard to send him to the State's Prison. He was a Democrat of the Democrats, the standard-bearer of the Bowery Boys, the Fourth Warders, and of the Bloody Sixth. Former mayors, who had represented the respectability, decency, and morality of the city, were accessible to all during business hours. In the central room in the City Hall, surrounded with clerks, sitting at his low desk, the mayor could usually be

seen. All this was too democratic for Fernando Wood. He had an office elegantly fitted up in the rear. He called it the Mayor's Private Office. Into this he retreated, and the doors were guarded by policemen. Bullies and Short Boys, who for years had the run of the City Hall, going in and out of the mayor's office when they pleased, were astounded to find "Fernandy" putting on airs, and closing his door in the face of the men who put him into power. They resolved to beard him in his new den. They were met at the door by a well-dressed official, who informed them, in decided tones, that the mayor was engaged. They could do nothing but retire, muttering vengeance. The old mayor's room was a disgrace. Under Mr. Wood it was cleansed, the ceilings elegantly painted, the floor carpeted, and pictures hung on the wall; the desks fell back in a line; confusion and tumult ceased; men came only on business, quietly did it, and went away. A portion of the citizens were jubilant over the new order of things. A portion were surprised, and knew not what to make of it. Some resolved to resist the despot in the City Hall. Mr. Wood carried things with an iron rule. He enforced the laws as they had not been enforced for half a century. He opened a complaint book, and invited all the citizens who had grievances to present them, and they should be attended to. The slightest breach of discipline was punished. If an officer came into the mayor's office without his official coat, he was ordered out, and told if he repeated the offence he would be dismissed. Men in the chief offices of the City Hall resolved to rebel. They did not like their new chief, and said they would

not be so worked or so governed. Wood got the names of the chief men in this conspiracy. He laid the charge to them, and told them coolly that he would carry out his reform against all opposition, if he was obliged to call out the entire military force of the city.

HE WINS OVER THE PUBLIC.

A man with such a reputation as Mr. Wood brought with him into office, whose election and inaugural were regarded with terror and dismay, would be closely watched while in office. When he avowed himself the champion of good order, of the enforcement of law and sound morals, not only New York, but the nation was jubilant. No public man, since the days of General Jackson, was so popular. He held a daily levee in his private room. Judges, justices, and lawyers, from all parts of the country, sought his acquaintance. The clergy preached about him, and prayed for him. The press lauded him; lauded his executive ability, his courage, and the grand administration he was giving to New York. Men who had clamored, before his inauguration, for his incarceration in prison, took him by the hand, confessed their sins, and wished him God speed. The grand jury, who had been ready to indict him, now spoke his praise. Great religious societies passed him votes of thanks. To a committee who presented him these compliments he said, "I am only doing my duty. New York pays enough to be well governed, and she shall be. The Sunday laws shall be enforced, and I am resolved to give New York such Sabbaths as she deserves. When I cannot do this, I shall resign." He won over the temperance men and

the clergy. He was a member of St. George, of which Dr. Tyng was pastor. Strangers crowded the church on Sunday to see the great man of the age. At a great temperance meeting, Dr. Tyng, his pastor, spoke in behalf of Mr. Wood, while the audience cheered every sentence. Said the doctor, "I know intimately the noble man who is at the head of the city. He is a true man. He is a member of my congregation. You may be assured that he will take no backward steps." A great meeting was held at the Tabernacle. The Hutchinsons composed a song in honor of the mayor, which was sung amid a tempest of applause. One verse of it ran as follows:—

"Our city laws are pretty good,  
Nowadays, nowadays,  
When put in force by Mr. Wood,  
Nowadays, nowadays."

His name became a terror to evil-doers. It was a tower of strength to good government in all the cities in America. A passenger stopped a train in Michigan, seized a desperate pickpocket who threatened to cut his throat, and, single-handed, ejected him from the cars, and started the train, the people shouting, "That must be Mayor Wood!" Hundreds of letters were received at the mayor's office, describing crime and wickedness that existed in other cities, and calling upon Mr. Wood to come and put a stop to the evil. It was thought he could work anywhere.

## ASSUMES HIS REAL CHARACTER.

It is difficult to ascribe a reason for Mr. Wood's course during the first six months of his official life. Why he inspired such hopes in the heart of the friends of good government, order, and reform; why he turned his back on his old friends and old principles for that brief term,—it is difficult to understand. That he was not sincere, that his principles and conduct were not changed, his subsequent acts sufficiently proved. That he made himself immensely popular is unquestionable. Had he really turned over a new leaf, been in heart what he professed to be, governed New York during his whole term as he governed it the first six months, he would have had a social and political standing that would have been exceeded by none of the noble men whose names are revered by New York. Any office in the state or nation that he desired would have been opened to him. When he went back to his old friends and his old ways he made the mistake of a lifetime. The farce was soon ended. The predictions preceding his election were more than realized,—among the bold, bad rulers of New York he would be the chief. The police under his hands became so corrupt that the laws were changed to take away his power. The united populace, without distinction of party, cried to the Legislature for relief. A commission was sent down to rule the city. Rioters resisted the law, their headquarters being in the mayor's office. Mr. Wood led the old police to resist the city government unto blood. The Seventh Regiment were called out to serve a civil process on the mayor. The mayor was reduced to a

mere walking gentleman, whose chief business consists in drawing his salary once a month.

## PERSONAL.

Mr. Wood is about sixty years of age. His hair is dark, but his mustache snowy white. He is tall, slim, and very erect. However well he is dressed, there is always a seedy look about him, such as marks a well-dressed loafer. He wears black, has a clerical look, and would be mistaken anywhere for a professor in college. He has a perpetual smile on his face, which, cold and hollow, is well described by the word *smirk*. He dresses evidently with care, and with as much taste as he can command. He makes up well, has been carefully preserved, and before he allowed his gray mustache to grow looked scarcely forty years of age. There is an insincerity about him, which you feel whenever he speaks to you. In his dress and deportment he shows his shrewdness. He has nothing to hope for but from the debased of New York. To them he caters. His careful array and sanctified demeanor are the secret of his power. Wood understands human nature. The vile and ignominious want a champion, but they do not want him to look vile and ignominious. They want him to dress and walk with the best. They point to him when he is in public, and say, "That's our champion. He is as smart and genteel, as handsomely dressed, and behaves himself as well, as any of them." Wood understands this well. When he goes among his constituents in the lower parts of New York he goes well made up. His black frock coat, buttoned up to the throat, displays his lithe and genteel form to advantage.

His hat, of the latest style, is well brushed and glossy. His boots, of the newest fashion, are polished like a mirror. His gloves fit the hand, and, with a small switch or walking cane, he moves round among the purlieus of the city like a person from another world. So his constituents receive him. He is civil and bland, but icy. He speaks to the women; pats the little, dirty urchins on the head with his dainty fingers; holds his levees in beer saloons and Dutch groceries, and drinks lager with his friends out of the rude mugs, as if he was tipping champagne at the St. Nicholas. Everywhere he wears the same bland, treacherous smile; everywhere he is the same wily treacherous politician.