

"Besides, Taffy's as simple as a little child himself, and couldn't fool any one, and wouldn't if he could—not even a parson. But if any one tries to fool *him*, my eyes! don't he cut up rough, and call names, and kick up a shindy, and even knock people down! That's the worst of fellows like Taffy. They're too good for this world and too solemn. They're impossible, and lack all sense of humor. In point of fact, Taffy's a *gentleman*—poor fellow! *et puis voilà!*

"I'm not simple—worse luck; and I can't knock people down—I only wish I could! I can only paint them! and not even *that* 'as they really are!' . . . Good old Taffy! . . .

"Faint heart never won fair lady!

"Oh, happy, happy thought—I'll be brave and win!

"I can't knock people down, or do doughty deeds, but I'll be brave in my own little way—the only way I can. . . .

"I'll simply lie through thick and thin—I must—I will—nobody need ever be a bit the wiser! I can do more good by lying than by telling the truth, and make more deserving people happy, including myself and the sweetest girl alive—the end shall justify the means: that's my excuse, my only excuse! and this lie of mine is on so stupendous a scale that it will have to last me for life. It's my only one, but its name is *Lion!* and I'll never tell another as long as I live.

"And now that I know what temptation really is, I'll never think any harm of any parson any more . . . never, never, never!"

So the little man went on, as if he knew all about it, had found it all out for himself, and nobody else had ever found it out before! and I am not responsible for his ways of thinking (which are not necessarily my own).

It must be remembered, in extenuation, that he was very young, and not very wise: no philosopher, no scholar—just a painter of lovely pictures; only that and nothing more. Also, that he was reading Mr. Darwin's immortal book for the third time, and it was a little too strong for him; also, that all this happened in the early sixties, long ere Religion had made up her mind to meet Science half-way, and hobnob and kiss and be friends. Alas! before such a lying down of the lion and the lamb can ever come to pass, Religion will have to perform a larger share of the journey than half, I fear!

Then, still carried away by the flood of his own eloquence (for he had never had such an innings as this, no such a listener), he again apostrophized the dog Tray, who had been growing somewhat inattentive (like the reader, perhaps), in language more beautiful than ever:

"Oh, to be like you, Tray—and secrete love and good-will from morn till night, from night till morning—like saliva, without effort! with never a moment's cessation of flow, even in disgrace and humiliation! How much better to love than to be loved—to love as you do, my Tray—so warmly, so easily, so unremittingly—to forgive all wrongs and neglect and injustice so quickly and so well—and forget a kindness never! Lucky dog that you are!

“Oh! could I feel as I have felt, or be as I have been,  
Or weep as I could once have wept, o'er many a vanished scene,  
As springs in deserts found seem sweet, all brackish tho' they  
be,  
So 'midst this withered waste of life those tears would flow  
to me!”

“What do you think of those lines, Tray? I love them, because my mother taught them to me when I was about your age—six years old, or seven! and before the bard who wrote them had fallen; like Lucifer, son of the morning! Have you ever heard of Lord Byron, Tray? He too, like Ulysses, loved a dog, and many people think that's about the best there is to be said of him nowadays! Poor Humpty Dumpty! Such a swell as he once was! ‘Not all the king's horses, nor all the—’”

Here Tray jumped up suddenly and bolted—he saw some one else he was fond of, and ran to meet him. It was the vicar, coming out of his vicarage.

A very nice-looking vicar—fresh, clean, alert, well tanned by sun and wind and weather—a youngish vicar still; tall, stout, gentlemanlike, shrewd, kindly, wordly, a trifle pompous, and authoritative more than a trifle; not much given to abstract speculation, and thinking fifty times more of any sporting and orthodox young country squire, well-inched and well-acred (and well-whiskered), than of all the painters in Christendom.

“‘When Greeks joined Greeks, then was the tug of war,’” thought Little Billee; and he felt a little uncomfortable. Alice's father had never loomed so big and impressive before, or so distressingly nice to look at.

“Welcome, my Apelles, to your ain countree, which is growing quite proud of you, I declare! Young Lord Archie Waring was saying only last night that he wished he had half your talent! He's *crazed* about painting, you know, and actually wants to be a painter himself! The poor dear old marquis is quite sore about it!”

With this happy exordium the parson stopped and shook hands; and they both stood for a while, looking seaward. The parson said the usual things about the sea—its blueness; its grayness; its greenness; its beauty; its sadness; its treachery.

“‘Who shall put forth on thee,  
Unfathomable sea!’”

“Who indeed!” answered Little Billee, quite agreeing. “I vote *we* don't, at all events.” So they turned inland.

The parson said the usual things about the land (from the country-gentleman's point of view), and the talk began to flow quite pleasantly, with quoting of the usual poets, and capping of quotations in the usual way—for they had known each other many years, both here and in London. Indeed, the vicar had once been Little Billee's tutor.

And thus, amicably, they entered a small wooded hollow. Then the vicar, turning of a sudden his full blue gaze on the painter, asked, sternly:

“What book's that you've got in your hand, Willie?”

“A—a—it's the *Origin of Species*, by Charles Darwin. I'm very f-f-fond of it. I'm reading it for the

third time. . . . It's very g-g-good. It *accounts* for things, you know."

Then, after a pause, and still more sternly :

"What place of worship do you most attend in London—especially of an evening, William?"

Then stammered Little Billee, all self-control forsaking him :

"I d-d-don't attend any place of worship at all, morning, afternoon, or evening. I've long given up going to church altogether. I can only be frank with you ; I'll tell you why. . . ."

And as they walked along the talk drifted on to very momentous subjects indeed, and led, unfortunately, to a serious falling out—for which probably both were to blame—and closed in a distressful way at the other end of the little wooded hollow—a way most sudden and unexpected, and quite grievous to relate. When they emerged into the open, the parson was quite white, and the painter crimson.

"Sir," said the parson, squaring himself up to more than his full height and breadth and dignity, his face big with righteous wrath, his voice full of strong menace—"sir, you're—you're a—you're a *thief*, sir, a *thief*! You're trying to *rob me of my Saviour*! Never you dare to darken *my door-step* again!"

"Sir," said Little Billee, with a bow, "if it comes to calling names, you're—you're a—no ; you're Alice's father ; and whatever else you are besides, I'm another for trying to be honest with a parson ; so good-morning to you."

And each walked off in an opposite direction, stiff as pokers ; and Tray stood between, looking first



"YOU'RE A THIEF, SIR!"

at one receding figure, then at the other, disconsolate.

And thus Little Billee found out that he could no more lie than he could fly. And so he did not marry sweet Alice after all, and no doubt it was ordered for her good and his. But there was tribulation for many days in the house of Bagot, and for many months in one tender, pure, and pious bosom.

And the best and the worst of it all is that, not very many years after, the good vicar—more fortunate than most clergymen who dabble in stocks and shares—grew suddenly very rich through a lucky speculation in Irish beer, and suddenly, also, took to thinking seriously about things (as a man of business should)—more seriously than he had ever thought before. So at least the story goes in North Devon, and it is not so new as to be incredible. Little doubts grew into big ones—big doubts resolved themselves into downright negations. He quarrelled with his bishop; he quarrelled with his dean; he even quarrelled with his “poor dear old marquis,” who died before there was time to make it up again. And finally he felt it his duty, in conscience, to secede from a Church which had become too narrow to hold him, and took himself and his belongings to London, where at least he could breathe. But there he fell into a great disquiet, for the long habit of feeling himself always *en évidence*—of being looked up to and listened to without contradiction; of exercising influence and authority in spiritual matters (and even temporal); of impressing women, especially, with his commanding presence, his fine sonorous voice, his lofty brow, so serious and smooth, his

soft, big, waving hands, which soon lost their country tan—all this had grown as a second nature to him, the breath of his nostrils, a necessity of his life. So he rose to be the most popular Unitarian preacher of his day, and pretty broad at that.

But his dear daughter Alice, she stuck to the old faith, and married a venerable High-Church archdeacon, who very cleverly clutched at and caught her and saved her for himself just as she stood shivering on the very brink of Rome; and they were neither happy nor unhappy together—*un ménage bourgeois, ni beau ni laid, ni bon ni mauvais*. And thus, alas! the bond of religious sympathy, that counts for so much in united families, no longer existed between father and daughter, and the heart's division divided them. *Ce que c'est que de nous!* . . . The pity of it!

And so no more of sweet Alice with hair so brown.