

WAS IT FLIRTING?

I was engaged to Angelina Melville, and I thought myself the luckiest man living. Angelina was so handsome that no stranger ever saw her without expressing admiration, and one did not weary with the face after years of familiarity with it. She was well bred, accomplished and a great heiress. I had reason to believe that she was very fond of me. No man could be more content than I was, as I leaned back in the first-class carriage which took me from Glasgow into the country to the Vale of Cruix, where I was to preach a few Sabbaths. The pulpit was vacant, and I was going to try my wings. With my pecuniary prospects I scarcely thought I should care to accept a call to the Vale of Cruix, but I had no objection to filling its pulpit for a few weeks, especially as Angelina had gone to the west coast, and Glasgow was warm and stuffy and stupid.

Casual remembrances of elegant parsonages built in Queen Anne's style; of a study where the footfalls were softened by Persian rugs, and the doors draped in portieres of velvets; chairs and a desk, carved richly as some old confessional, lifted through my mind. And I thought also of a table spread with silver and rare china, with a lady at its head who resembled a queen. And I breathed a luxurious sigh as I awakened from my day-dream to a knowledge that the words "Vale of Cruix" were being shouted out on the platform, and that the train was coming to a standstill.

I seized my traveling-bag from the rack overhead and hurried out of the carriage. The porters had just pulled four or five trucks on the platform. Two old wagons stood in the road, one driven by an old woman in a sun-bonnet, the other by a red-haired boy with bare feet; and a queer knock-kneed horse, attached to a queer old gig, was standing at a little distance. A young man in a light summer suit and a city family bent on rural happiness were my companions on the platform. The former put his trunks in the first wagon, kissed the old woman in the sun-bonnet, took the reins and drove away. He was evidently the son of the family, come home to spend his vacation. The rest of the trunks and the city family—mother, father, little boy, nursemaid and baby—were put in the wagon and driven off by the boy.

When the train moved away I was left alone on the platform—alone but for the station-master, who sat upon a bench smoking a clay pipe. In a moment more the official, without looking at me, made the remark: "Deacon Stevenson has come for the new minister. He's over in the hotel, and will be back in a minute."

"Thank you," said I. The station-master took no notice of me, but having climbed up on a stool and made some changes in a time register on the wall of the station, locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and sauntered away down the railroad. I took his place upon the bench and waited. In a few minutes a prim little old gentleman appeared upon the top of the bill, carrying in one hand a tin can, in the other a tin pail, and under either arm a brown paper parcel. I knew at a glance that it was Stevenson.

"Are you Mr. Mactaggert?" he inquired, mildly, as he approached. "I want to know. I hadn't any expectation of being kept so long; but, you see, it saves the women folks trouble to fetch things when I drive to town. Step in, won't you? I'll just hang this paraffine oil on behind. Some dislike the smell—maybe you do. The sugar-loaf tea and coffee can go under the seat as well as not. How's your health, sir, and how do you like Vale of Cruix?"

I answered that my health was good, and that I had not, as yet, seen much of the Vale of Cruix. "No, you haven't," said the old gentleman. "Well, you'll drive through it now." And he shook the reins and the old horse began to stumble along. And on we drove past certain rows of brick houses very much like each other, and with the same flowers in their front gardens, until, having passed the church, we came to one happily set about by old oak trees, before the gate of which we drew up.

A girl stood at the gate—a fair girl in a blue muslin dress and white apron. "Take the sugar, Mary, before it gets upset," said the deacon. "This is Mr. Mactaggert, that's going to preach for us. Mr. Mactaggert, this is my daughter Mary."

We both bowed, and she vanished with the parcels. "What a lovely creature!" said I to myself. "Nothing like Angelina, but so pretty!" And I found myself thinking of her as I washed and brushed my hair in the blue-walled bedroom on the second floor, with white-fringed counterpanes and curtains, and two black silhouettes over the mantelpiece, on either side of the china vases of roses.

There were only four of us at the table—the deacon, his wife (a stout lady who never said more than she could help), Mary and myself. Mary had spent the last winter at Glasgow, and we talked about all she had seen. She was self-possessed without being forward, and oh, so pretty! Now, Angelina was splendid and queenly; so this was mild praise that she could not have objected to, only I said it very often. I preached on the next Sunday. It was settled that I should spend the summer there. I wrote this to Angelina:

"Since you cannot be with me, it does not matter where I am—this stupid place as well as any other. Address to the care of Deacon Stevenson. I shall remain with him while I preach here."

It was a pleasant summer, despite the dullness of the place. How good the quaint old deacon was, when one really knew him! How motherly was Mrs. Stevenson! As for Mary, she grew sweeter every day. I often wondered what Angelina would have said could she have seen me helping her to pick blackberries, to find the runaway cow, to carry home the milk pail, driving her over to the country grocery, and returning with a freight of groceries—Angelina, who knew nothing of domestic details, and whose monogrammed and perfumed letters were often brought over from the office in company with the paraffine can. I wrote my sermons at one end of the round table, while Mary sat at the other sewing. Between us

was a lamp with a green paper shade. Now and then a big bug would fly into the window and go humming about our heads, or a moth would try to sing its wings over the chimney, and I would drive it out. The old people would go to bed after awhile, and then Mary and I would find ourselves hungry, and she would go into the kitchen to find something good. I always held the light for her; and when something good was found we ate it in the back porch, sitting side by side on the step like two children. She was so like a child, that little Mary, that it seemed no harm to ask her to kiss me good-night, or to hold her hand in mine as it rested on my arm in our long walks home from church on Sunday evening.

The summer passed; October came; Angelina returned to the city and wrote to me. It was while we were eating peaches and cream in the back porch that evening that I said to Mary: "I will tell you a secret if you will keep it for awhile, Mary."

"Oh, of course I will, Mr. Mactaggert."

"I am going to be married this autumn, Mary," I said. "Those pretty letters you always thought came from my sister are from the lady who is to marry me. She is very beautiful, very rich, very stylish, but very kind. You must come and see us, Mary, when you are married. I shall tell Angelina how good you have been to me—what a sweet little sister I have found out here in the Vale of Cruix. Why, Mary—"

For, as I spoke, I felt the little hand I held grow cold and heavy in mine. I saw her sink backward. The big china bowl of peaches and cream slipped with a crash to the ground and was shattered to pieces.

I caught the poor child in my arms. In a moment she came to herself and said she had fainted herself, she thought. They had been baking all day, and it was warm. And now she bade me good-night. But I did not see her next day, nor the next. She kept her room, and was not well enough to bid me good-bye.

Poor little Mary! I felt very miserable. However, Angelina met me at Glasgow. She was more beautiful than ever—more elegant in contrast to my simple country friend—and very soon I laughed at myself for the thought that had been in my heart. Of course, I said it was the baking that had overcome Mary—it was not my news. I had only been to her as a friend—as a brother. I had not made love to her; above all, I had not flirted with her. But I thought of Mary a great deal, and I missed her every hour, exactly—oh, yes, exactly—as I might a sister.

I wrote to Mrs. Stevenson, and her answer was very brief: "I haven't much time to write," she said in her postscript. "Mary is sick, and besides being driven I am anxious." The letter was in my pocket on that day when Angelina and I went together to the bazaar for the benefit of the Church of St. Matthew.

After we had roomed at the bazaar and bought all sorts of things, I escorted Angelina to a seat and sat down to wait while one of the waiters who, "on this occasion of a bazaar," good, generous, hard work, as was a tray of refreshments.

As we sat there sipping our coffee two women sat down at the next table with their backs to us.

"I am very tired, are you not, Mrs. Russell?" And the other answered: "Yes, I am tired. I don't think that it is worth the while to come all the way from Vale of Cruix to Glasgow sight seeing."

This was the voice of Stevenson's nearest neighbor and I liked and respected her, yet did not feel quite sure how Angelina would like an introduction, and so refrained from looking round and making myself known.

"I think we'd better have tea," said the voice: "it's more refreshing than coffee. Oh, how is Mary to-day? Think of my never asking before."

"Mary is poorly," said Mrs. Russell. "Oh, Mrs. Cullen, what a pity it is that flirting young minister came down to the Vale of Cruix. I don't know what Mrs. Stevenson was about to let him do as he did! We all thought he was courting Mary. She did, poor child. She just loved him dearly. And the day before he went away he told her he was engaged to some girl in Glasgow. I'm afraid it's broken her heart. She told me all about it. 'Oh, Aunt Russell,' she said, 'I know I ought to be ashamed, but I can't help it. He seemed to like me so. I hope I shall die of this fever, for life is nothing to me.' Ashamed! Why, it is he who ought to be ashamed. Of all the things, a minister to be a cold, cruel flirt. And that is what Hugh Mactaggert is."

I listened, but I could not move or speak. I felt as though my heart also was breaking; and oh, the time I suffered! The women drank their tea and left, and then Angelina turned to me with a cold, sarcastic smile.

"I see by your face that the little story is perfectly true, Mr. Mactaggert," she said.

"Angelina, I faltered, 'I have done nothing that should give offense to you.'"

"Nothing but love another woman," she answered. "Love her, and let her see it, meaning to marry me. Don't think I'm hurt; indeed, I am relieved! I should have kept my word to you but for this; but not so gladly as I once should. You are a very good-looking man, but on the whole you don't suit me. I met Mr. S. at Millport, and he does. Frankly, I have been thinking what a pity it was that I must decline his offer. As for this—Mary, it is not—wouldn't she make a very good minister's wife?"

It came to my mind that she would—that she was the only wife for me; that Angelina, splendid as she was, would never have made me happy.

But I only said, "Miss Melville, if you desire to have your freedom I have no choice."

"I desire it greatly," she answered. "It is yours," I said, with a bow.

After that I think we were both happier than we had been for days, and we shook hands when we parted.

That night I went up to the Vale of Cruix, and I told Mary that my marriage was broken off and that she was the only woman I had ever loved. She tried to summon up her pride and refuse me, but failed in the attempt, and let me take her to my heart. To-day I am

pastor of the church at the Vale of Cruix. Mary is my wife, and we are a plain and quiet pair as you could fancy. I even help my wife pick currants, and I have taken a turn at the garden when help was scarce. But I do not envy Mr. S. his wife nor pine for the luxurious possibilities that I lost with Angelina. Mary and my little home content me.

But one thing is on my conscience: I have never been able to ask myself the question, "Did I flirt with Mary?" If not, what was I?

The Intelligent Jay Bird.

[Nature.] The following instance of animal intelligence may interest some of our readers: While walking through the forest here the other day, I found a young jay upon the ground scarcely able to fly. As I stooped to examine it I was somewhat startled by a swoop made at my head by the old birds, their wings actually touching my hat. Determined not to be driven away, I remained by the young bird, whereupon a succession of like swoops were made at my head. These I easily succeeded in parrying with my stick, although the old birds frequently came in different directions. After a couple of minutes the old birds seemed to have come to the conclusion that nothing could be achieved in this fashion, and one of them, flying to some little distance, kept calling to the younger one, who half hopped, half flew to her.

I of course followed, and now occurred what seemed to me a striking instance of animal sagacity. The pines here are covered with lichen, and a long, hairy kind of moss, which easily crumbles into dust. The cock bird perched himself in a tree over my head, and began pecking with wonderful rapidity at this lichen and moss, so that the moment I looked up a shower of fine dust fell on my face. As I followed the young bird the old one followed me, got on a branch as close to me as he could, and sent a shower of dust upon me. I scarcely doubt that the dust, like the previous swoops, was intended rather to blind me than to distract my attention. Have instances of like sagacity—i. e., the apparent knowledge of the organ of vision and the means of injuring it—been noticed in jays before?

Another Mystery of the Arctics.

[Cleveland Leader.] The Greely party sailed July 7, 1881, a few days after President Garfield was shot. The last news they received at St. Johns was encouraging, and they believed he had recovered. More that two years elapsed, during which they were utterly cut off from communication with their fellow-men, so that some meager scraps of newspapers which had been used for wrapping paper were treasured like gold. They were spread out, put together, and eagerly scanned. President Arthur was alluded to, and they then knew the fatal issue of the assassin's shot: The loss of the Jeannette was mentioned, and they supposed the entire crew had perished. The word "dude" appeared in the print. This was a stunner. They had never heard of it before, and many and sharp were the controversies regarding its signification. One of the first interrogatories uttered from the throats of the feeble survivors as they saw approaching the rescuing party was: "What is a dude?"

Fruit Packers' Secret.

[Chicago News.] There is one little secret well-known to packers in regard to fruit canned or preserved with the pits remaining in, or such as contains large seeds where germinating qualities are not readily killed by steaming. Every one who has any knowledge of preserving knows that in the spring-time preserved fruit left over from the winter is apt to ferment. Packers find this disposition of the fruit to bubble and sour a great nuisance and loss, for each fancifully labeled can must be rescaled to the destruction of the label. That fermentation is caused by the germinal instinct of reproduction making itself manifest in the fruit seed. Many fruits, such as peaches and plums, have a finer flavor by being preserved without removing the pits. When they are put up in this way attention should be given to them from time to time to see whether or not any symptoms of fermentation is shown, and if so the first should be recooked.

He Practiced.

[Pack.] "What is that drab old fellow hanging from the lower limb of that apple tree?" asked a dude of a freckled country boy.

"That," said the boy, "is a sort of foot ball that we strike to make our 'muckie big.'"

"May I try it?" asked the dude.

"I guess so," replied the boy, as he moved off a good distance.

So the dude drew back and drove his fist right into an old-fashioned hornets' nest and got his sleeve chucked full.

Send a 2-cent stamp, with your name and address distinctly written, to the boy if you want anything like a true picture of the finale. We are not equal to the task.

Three Letter's Charm.

[Bill Arr.] I reckon there must be some charm in three letters all alike and in a row, for a colored friend of mine came the other day and says he, "boss, if you is gwine to town I wish you would take dis here dollar an' get me some medicine, my ole 'oman is right puny an' don't have no appetite to eat nothin' and I want you to get her some chronic medicine, some thin' with three letters on it all in a row. Three S's, or three B's, or three X's or some other letters all alike. I think it will help her." Well, I forgot it and brought him back his dollar and his wife got well.

Odor of Russian Leather.

According to The Chemist and Druggist the substance which gives to Russian leather its peculiar aromatic and lasting qualities is the oil of white birch bark (oleum betulæ). Dissolved in alcohol it is said to render fabrics proof against water, acid and insects, and renders them more lasting.

A Valuable Discovery.

Cryolite, a mineral which is of great value in the potash manufacture, has been discovered in the Yellowstone park. Heretofore it has been obtained only in Greenland.

A HUGE ELECTRIC EEL.

How It Was Brought from South America—Indians Killed by It. (London Daily News.)

A very interesting addition has recently been made to the zoological gardens in the shape of an electric eel—gymnotus electricus. It is said to be nearly six feet in length, and must therefore be one of the very largest specimens of its kind. Those who remember the palmy days of the old Polytechnic may recollect a diminutive electric eel which used to deal out very decided shocks to visitors who had the temerity to touch it, and which used to kill, or at any rate to stun, the live fish which were put into its tank for food. The newcomer is altogether a more formidable fellow, and when he has time to recruit after the long voyage from South America, during which he was rather cruelly celled in a vessel in which he could not move without chafing himself raw in several places, it will be anything but wise to venture on any liberties with him.

Humboldt, when in the native home of this fish, in and about the Rio Colorado, measured some that were five feet five inches in length, but though the Indians said there were larger, he himself saw none. The captive in Regent's park is no doubt therefore a very big specimen, and there can be little doubt of its power. Humboldt thought that the Indians of the locality referred to had exaggerated ideas on this subject, but they no doubt had had practical experience, while the illustrious traveler seems to have prudently refrained from testing the matter except in the case of an eel in a somewhat exhausted condition. He admits that it would be temerity to expose one's self to the first shocks of a large and strongly irritated gymnotus, and though he does not mention any case within his knowledge of any human life being lost by a shock from the fish, the mode of catching them adopted by the Indians seems to render it by no means incredible that, as some have asserted, this fish is capable of killing a man.

The Indians, it seems, are accustomed, when they want to catch gymnoti, to scour the country round for wild horses and mules, which they drive into the ponds where the fish are known to be, and so violent are the discharges of the pent-up lightnings to which these animals are exposed that, though they are not actually killed by electricity, they are so stunned and disabled that usually several of them are drowned. Humboldt once imprudently put both his feet on an electric eel just taken out of the water, and though he does not speak of it as a large one, he says he never experienced from a large Leyden jar a more dreadful discharge than he felt on that occasion. He was affected all day with a violent pain in every joint of his body.

It seems to be generally agreed that the electric force of this fish is closely dependent on its general vitality, and as the new arrival is as yet only in a comparatively poor condition, perhaps no great harm would result from bodily contact with it.

Better Than a Good Gymnasium.

[David Swing in Weekly Magazine.] After all written and spoken about health and exercise, after all the implements for making muscles have been gathered into a heap and carefully studied and tested, the best gymnasium for a city man or a city woman is an acre or two of ground. Where the possession of such a piece of earth is impossible, or where one has no annual vacation for living upon said land, our argument comes to naught. These persons must accept dumb-bells and Indian clubs, but for the tens of thousands who can go to hotels and summer resorts each year the possession and culture of a few acres is the resort perfect. The fashionable watering-place is a miserable tonic compared with this attack upon the soil.

Across upon a lake or river, because water has a purifying effect upon the air, also cools the air, will generate no dust, and then, what is so valuable to the health-seeker, it offers the mind variety of scene and pursuit, and also perpetual beauty. Nothing like water for pleasure. Upon it glides your row-boat or sail-boat. The waters ripple a welcome as though glad you have come. The air fans you the more because it can move upon a level surface. Pulling at the oar or handling the sail ropes is an exercise which awakens the heart's enthusiasm. When a mortal swings Indian clubs he shuts himself up in a room and acts as sadly as a blind horse in a bark-mill, but put the same mortal in a row-boat on Lake Button or Lake Lily or Lake Bear or Wolf or Fox, with the shady shores near by and transparent water under the boat with a magnificent sunrise or sunset on the horizon, and the nervous power of the body comes back until the worn-out man of 50 sings and rows and rows and sings as though thirty years had been removed from his past account with nature.

A Huge Dredging Machine.

[Chicago Herald.] The largest dredging machine in the world has been finished and will be used on the Sacramento and San Joaquin swamp lands in California. She has been named Thor, and modeled after the best dredges now in use on the Isthmian canal, cutting out a channel and building a levee at the same time. The Thor is 101 feet long and 61 feet wide, and has 34 iron buckets with a capacity of 1½ cubic yards each, which can be filled and emptied fourteen times per minute.

The Quotation Nuisance.

[Pall Mall Gazette.] Will no critic of eminence raise a protest against the quotation nuisance? A fierce desire to quote something—anything—especially anything that rhymes—is raging like an epidemic among our public speakers, and ministers seem specially exposed to the attacks of the disease. But it is not written in the now almost forgotten catalogue of style that unless a quotation is very fresh or very apposite, it is not an ornament, but a blemish to a speech!

Soldiers Discharged.

When the war closed nearly 8,000,000 men who were serving in the armistice on both sides were discharged and returned to civil life.

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