

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 become acquainted with me, without being struck by the 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 the pulpit for a few weeks, especially as Angelina had gone to the west coast, and Glasgow was very quiet 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 velvet; chairs and a desk, carved in some old-fashioned style, floated 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 remembered that I had 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 travelling bag from the rack overhead, and hurried out of the carriage. The portiers had just pulled four or five trunks 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-knee horse, attached to a queer old gig, was standing at a little distance. A young man in a light suit stepped and the family bent over the trunk. I saw that I was my companions on the platform. The former put his trunk 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 family, the city lady, the 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—and 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 a 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, looked at his 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 scene of the hill, carrying in one hand a tin can, in the other a tin snail, and under either arm a brown paper parcel. I know as a glance that it was Stevenson.

"Are you Mr. Mactaggert?" he inquired, mildly, as he approached. "I want to know if you had any expectation of being kept so long; but, you see, it saves the women folk trouble to fetch things when I drive to town. Step in, won't you? I'll just hang this paraffine oil on behind. Some folks like 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 the 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 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 the happy spot about by old oak trees, before the gate of which we drew up.

Now and then a green paper bag 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. The two children were so like their mother 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 something you will like to hear, while 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 in the Vale of Cruix. Why, Mary—"

"For, as I spoke, I felt the little hand I hold 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 oversteered 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 bed, and I did not see her again."

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 thoughts that had been in my heart. Of course, I said it was the baking that had overcome Mary—it was not my own. 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."

This letter was in my pocket on that day when Angelina and I went together to the house for the benefit of the Church of St. Matthew. After we had roamed about the bazaar and bought all sorts of knickknacks I escorted Angelina to a seat, and there sat down to wait while one of the ladies, who, "on this occasion only," was doing good, generous, hard work, brought us 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."

pastor of the church at the Vale of Cruix. Mary is my wife, and we are so plain and quiet a pair as you could fancy. 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. B. his wife nor pine for the luxurious possibilities that I see 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 it?

The following instance of animal intelligence may interest some of your 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 bird, the 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 bird frequently came in different directions. After a couple of minutes the old bird 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 had 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 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 sorely doubt that the dust, like the previous swoops, was intended rather to blind me than to distract my attention. Have instances of like sagacity—a. a. the apparent knowledge of the signs of vision and the means of injuring it—been noticed in jays before?

Another Mystery of the Arctic. (Cleveland Leader.) The Green 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 than two years elapsed, during which they were utterly cut off from communication with their fellow-men, so that some danger arose of newspapers which had been used for wrapping paper were treasured like gold. They were spread out, past 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 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 recalled 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. (Puck.) "What is that drab object hanging from the lower limb of that apple tree?" asked a dude of a frocked country boy. "That," said the boy, "is a sort of football that we strike to make our 'muckle' 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 hornet's nest and got his sleeve chucked full.

Send a 3-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 Arp.) 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 nuffin' and don't have no appetite to eat nothin' and I want you to get her some chronic medicin'; some-thing with three letters on it all in a row. Three S's, or three B's, or three K'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.

Order of Russian Leather. According to The Chemist and Druggist the substance which gives to Russia leather its peculiar aromatic and lasting qualities is the oil of white birch bark (oleum betule). 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 polish manufacture, has been discovered in the Yellowstone park. Heretofore it has been obtained only in Greenland.

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