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HONOR FOR THE PAST, HELP FOR THE PRESENT, HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.

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STRAINING AT GNATS.

Dr. Talmage Preaches on Human Inconsistency.

Makes Use of an Ancient Epigram to Illustrate the Folly of Mankind—Prone to Magnify Small Things, Heedless of the Great.

(Copyright, Louis Klopsch, 1899.)
Washington, July 16.

In this discourse, founded on an ancient epigram repeated by Christ, Dr. Talmage illustrates the folly of being very particular about insignificant things while negleetful of vast concerns. The text in Matthew 23:24, "Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel."

A proverb is compact wisdom, knowledge in chunks, a library in a sentence, the electricity of many clouds discharged in one bolt, a river put through a mill race. When Christ quotes the proverb of the text, he means to set forth the ludicrous behavior of those who make a great bluster about small sins and have no appreciation of great ones. In my text a small insect and a large quadruped are brought into comparison—a gnat and a camel. You have in museum or on the desert seen the latter, a great awkward, sprawling creature, with back two stories high and stomach having a collection of reservoirs for desert travel, an animal forbidden to the Jews as food, and in many literatures entitled "the ship of the desert." The gnat spoken of in the text is in the grub form. It is born in pool or pond, after a few weeks becomes a chrysalis, and then after a few days becomes the gnat as we recognize it. But the insect spoken of in the text is in its very smallest shape, and it yet inhabits the water, for my text is a misprint, and ought to read "strain out a gnat."

My text shows you the prince of inconsistencies. A man, after long observation, who has formed the suspicion that in a cupful of water he is about to drink, there is a grub or the grandparent of a gnat. He goes and gets a sieve or a strainer. He takes the water and pours it through the sieve in the broad light. He says: "I would rather do anything almost than drink this water until this larva be extirpated." This water is brought under inquisition. The experiment is successful. The water rushes through the sieve and leaves against the side of the sieve the grub or gnat. Then the man carefully removes the insect and drinks the water in placidity. But going out one day, and hungry, he devours a "ship of the desert," the camel, which the Jews were forbidden to eat. The gastronomer has no compunctions of conscience. He suffers from no indigestion. He puts the lower jaw under the camel's forefoot, and his upper jaw over the hump of the camel's back, and gives one swallow and the dromedary disappears forever. He strained out a gnat, he swallowed a camel.

While Christ's audience was yet smiling at the appositeness and wit of his illustration—for smile they did, unless they were too stupid to understand the hyperbole—Christ practically said to them: "That is you." Punctilious about small things; reckless about affairs of great magnitude. No subject ever winced under a surgeon's knife more bitterly than did the Pharisees under Christ's scalpel of truth. As an anatomist will take a human body to pieces and put the pieces under a microscope for examination, so Christ finds his way to the heart of the dead Pharisee and cuts it out and puts it under the glass of inspection for all generations to examine. Those Pharisees thought that Christ would flatter them and compliment them, and how they must have writhed under the red-hot words as He said: "Ye fools, ye whited sepulchers, ye blind guides, which strain out a gnat and swallow a camel."

There are in our day a great many gnats strained out and a great many camels swallowed, and it is the object of this sermon to sketch a few persons who are extensively engaged in that business.

First, I remark that all those ministers of the Gospel who are very scrupulous about the conventionalities of religion, but put no particular stress upon matters of vast importance, are photographed in the text. Church services ought to be grave and solemn. There is no room for frivolity in religious convocation, but there are illustrations, and there are hyperboles like that of Christ in the text that will irradiate with smiles any intelligent audience. There are men like those blind guides of the text who advocate only those things in religious service which draw the corners of the mouth down and denounce all those things which have a tendency to draw the corners of the mouth up, and these men will go to installations, and to presbyteries, and to conferences, and to associations, their pockets full of fine sieves to strain out the gnats, while in their own churches at home every Sunday there are 50 people sound asleep. They make their churches a great dormitory, and their somniferous sermons are a cradle and the drawled out hymns a lullaby, while some wakeful soul in a pew, with her fan, keeps the flies off unconscious persons approximate. Now, I say it is worse to sleep in church than to smile in church, for the latter implies at least attention, while the former implies the indifference of the hearers and the stupidity of the speaker.

In old age, or from physical infirmity, or from long watching with the sick, drowsiness will sometimes overpower one, but when a minister of the Gospel looks off upon an audience and finds healthy and intelligent people struggling with drowsiness it is time for him to give out the doxology or pronounce the benediction. The great fault of church services to-day is not too much vivacity, but too much somnolence. The one is an irritating gnat that may be easily strained out, the other is a great sprawling and sleepy-eyed camel of the dry desert. In all our Sabbath schools, in all our Bible classes, in all our pulpits, we need to brighten up our religious message with such Christlike vivacity as we find in the text.

Oh, how particular a great many people are about the infinitesimals while they are quite reckless about the magnitudes! What did Christ say? Did He not excoriate the people in his time who were so careful to wash their hands before a meal, but did not wash their hearts? It is a bad thing to have unclean hands. It is a worse thing to have an unclean heart. How many people there are in our time who are very anxious that after their death they shall be buried with their faces toward the east and not at all anxious that during their whole life they should face in the right direction, so that they shall come up in the resurrection of the just, whichever way they are buried! How many there are chiefly anxious that a minister of the Gospel shall come in the line of apostolic succession, not caring so much whether he comes from Apostle Paul or Apostle Judas! They have a way of measuring a gnat until it is larger than a camel.

Again, my subject photographs all those who are abhorrent of small sins while they are reckless in regard to magnificent thefts. You will find many a merchant who, while he is so careful that he would not take a yard of cloth or a spool of cotton from the counter without paying for it, and who, if a bank cashier should make a mistake and send in a roll of bills five dollars too much, would dispatch a messenger in hot haste to return the surplus, yet who will go into a stock company, in which after awhile he gets control of the stock, and then waters the stock and makes $100,000 appear like $200,000. He only stole $100,000 by the operation. Many of the men of fortune made their wealth in that way.

One of those men engaged in such unrighteous acts that evening, the evening of the very day when he watered the stock, will find a wharf rat stealing a daily paper from the basement doorway and will go out and catch the urchin by the collar and twist the collar so tightly the poor fellow has no power to say that it was thirst for knowledge that led him to the dishonest act, but grip the collar tighter and tighter, saying: "I have been looking for you a long while. You stole my paper four or five times, haven't you, you miserable wretch?" And then the old stock gambler, with a voice they can hear three blocks, will cry out: "Police, police!" That same man the evening of the day in which he watered the stock will kneel with his family in prayers and thank God for the prosperity of the day, then kiss his children good night with an air which seems to say: "I hope you all will grow up to be as good as your father." Prisons for sins insectile in size, but palaces for crimes dromedarian. No mercy for sins animalcule in proportion, but great leniency for mastodon iniquity. A poor boy slyly takes from the basket of a market woman a choke pear—saving some one else from the cholera—and you smother him in the horrible atmosphere of Raymond street jail or New York tombs, while his cousin, who has been skillful enough to steal $50,000 from the city, you make a candidate for the state legislature.

There is a good deal of uneasiness and nervousness now among some people in our time who have got unrighteous fortunes—a great deal of uneasiness about dynamite. I tell them that God will put under their unrighteous fortunes something more explosive than dynamite—the earthquake of His omnipotent indignation. It is time that we learn in America that sin is not excusable in proportion as it declares large dividends and has outriders in equipage. Many a man is riding to perdition, postilion ahead and lackey behind. To steal one copy of a newspaper is a gnat; to steal many thousands of dollars is a camel. There is many a fruit dealer who would not consent to steal a basket of peaches from a neighbor's stall, but who would not scruple to depress the fruit market, and as long as I can remember we have heard every summer the peach crop of Maryland is a failure, and by the time the crop comes in the misrepresentation makes a difference of millions of dollars. A man who would not steal one basket of peaches steals 50,000 baskets of peaches.

Go down into the public library, in the reading-rooms, and see the newspaper reports of the crops from all parts of the country, and their phraseology is very much the same, and the same men wrote them, methodically and infamously carrying out the huge lying about the grain crop from year to year and for a score of years. After awhile there will be a "corner" in the wheat market, and the men who had a contempt for petty theft will burglarize the wheat bin of a nation and commit larceny upon the American corn crib. And some of the men will sit in churches and in reformatory institutions trying to strain out the small gnats of scoundrelism, while in their grain elevators and in their storehouses they are fattening large camels which they expect after awhile to swallow. Society has to be entirely reconstructed on this subject. We are to find that a sin is inexcusable in proportion as it is great. I know in our time the tendency is to charge religious frauds upon good men. They say: "Oh, what a host of frauds you have in the church of God in this day!" And when the elder of a church, or a deacon, or a minister of the Gospel, or a superintendent of a Sabbath school turns out a defaulter, what display heads there are in many of the newspapers! Great primer type. Five-line pica. "Another Saint Absconded," "Clerical Scoundrelism," "Religion at a Discount," "Shame on the Churches," while there are a thousand scoundrels outside the church to one inside the church, and the misbehavior of those who never see the inside of a church is so great that it is enough to tempt a man to become a Christian to get out of their company. But in all circles, religious and irreligious, the tendency is to excuse sin in proportion as it is mammoth. Even John Milton in his "Paradise Lost," while he condemns Satan, gives such a grand description of him you have hard work to withhold your admiration. Oh, this straining out of small sins like gnats and this gulping down great iniquities like camels!

This subject does not give the picture of one or two persons, but is a gallery in which thousands of people may see their likenesses. For instance, all those people who, while they would not rob their neighbors of a farthing, appropriate the money and the treasure of the public. A man has a house to sell, and he tells his customer it is worth $20,000. Next day the assessor comes around and the owner says it is worth $15,000. The government of the United States took off the tax from personal income, among other reasons, because so few people would tell the truth, and many a man with an income of hundreds of dollars a day made statements which seemed to imply he was about to be handed over to the overseers of the poor. Careful to pay their passage from Liverpool to New York, yet smuggling in their saratoga trunk ten silk dresses from Paris and a half dozen watches from Geneva, Switzerland, telling the custom house officer on the wharf: "There is nothing in that trunk but wearing apparel," and putting a five-dollar gold piece in his hand to punctuate the statement.

Described in the text are all those who are particular never to break the law of grammar and who want all their language an elegant specimen of syntax, straining out all the inaccuracies of speech with a fine sieve of literary criticism, while through their conversation go slander and innuendo and profanity and falsehood larger than a whole caravan of camels, when they might better fracture every law of the language and shock their intellectual taste, and better let every verb seek in vain for its nominative and every noun for its government, and let every preposition lose its way in the sentence, and adjectives and participles and pronouns get into a grand riot worthy of the Fourth ward of New York on election day, than to commit a moral inaccuracy. Better swallow a thousand gnats than one camel.

Such persons are also described in the text who are very much alarmed about the small faults of others and have no alarm about their own great transgressions. There are in every community and in every church watchdogs who feel called upon to keep their eyes on others and growl. They are full of suspicions. They wonder if this man is not dishonest, if that man is not unclean, if there is not something wrong about the other man. They are always the first to hear of anything wrong. Vultures are always the first to smell carrion. They are self-appointed detectives. I lay this down as a rule without any exception, that those people who have the most faults themselves are most merciless in their watchings of others. From scalp of head to sole of foot they are full of jealousies and hypercriticisms. They spend their life in hunting for muskrats and mud turtles instead of hunting for Rocky mountain eagles, always for something mean instead of something grand. They look at their neighbors' imperfections through a microscope and look at their own imperfections through a telescope upside down. Twenty faults of their own do not hurt them so much as one fault of somebody else. Their neighbors' imperfections are like gnats, and they strain them out; their own imperfections are like camels, and they swallow them.

But lest too many might think they escape the scrutiny of the text, I have to tell you that we all come under the Divine satire when we make the questions of time more prominent than the questions of eternity. Come, now, let us all go into the confessional. Are not all tempted to make the question: Where shall I live now? greater than the question: Where shall I live forever? How shall I get more dollars [redacted] dodged the text. We said: "That does not mean me, and that does not mean me," and with a ruinous benevolence we are giving the whole sermon away.

But let us all surrender to the charge. What an ado about things here! What poor preparation for a great eternity! As though a minnow were larger than a behemoth, as though a swallow took wider circuit than an albatross, as though a nettle were taller than a Lebanon cedar, as though a gnat were greater than a camel, as though a minute were longer than a century, as though time were higher, deeper, broader than eternity. So the text which flashed with lightning of wit as Christ uttered it is followed by the crashing thunders of awful catastrophe to those who make the questions of time greater than the questions of the future, the oncoming, overshadowing future. Oh! Eternity Eternity! Eternity!

Caught in the Slips

I MUST say I felt awfully sorry, though not at all surprised, when I saw that Jack Fanshawe had lost his heart to Lucy Cleverly. Jack was one of the nicest boys I have ever known. I must beg his pardon, however, for classifying him among the boys of my acquaintance; since he was, in fact, a man—a 'varsity man—who had achieved 21 years, plus some odd months, with all and more than all the susceptibility of that impressionable age.

I had seen a great deal of Jack during the three years he had been "up." Papa was then professor of moral metaphysics. We lived in the Ilfley road, and, as we knew something of Jack's people, we naturally invited him to our house, where he soon became quite at home, running in and out as much as he pleased. Our acquaintance ripened into close friendship. It was not long before Jack grew to regard me as a sort of a sister, making me the recipient of his most secret confidences; now expecting my sympathy, which he always got, now requesting my advice, which he never took; but invariably, and under all circumstances, being the same frank, artless, open-hearted, brotherly Jack.

Of Lucy Cleverly I find it difficult to speak. When one girl, a homely, unattractive girl like myself, mentions another girl, a pretty, fascinating girl like Lucy, in deprecatory terms, folks are apt to ascribe it to jealousy and spite. But I assure you, upon my honor (though probably you will not believe me) that nothing of the sort enters my present description. Lucy was extremely pretty, in the brunette style, with the most graceful of girlish figures and the sweetest and most taking manner imaginable. But that was the extent of her good points—all on the surface. The real Lucy, that lay beneath, was a scheming, flirting, vain, heartless Lucy, who lived for admiration, and loved to have as many adorers as possible in tow; caring nothing for the pain she inflicted, nor the delusive hopes she raised, so long as she could show off the abject thralldom in which she held her devotees, and wear them, so to speak, for her public advertisement, as a redskin brave wears the scalps of his victims.

She meant, indeed, to marry; but she meant to marry well. She wanted money, and she wanted a title. Jack had neither; but he was not very far removed from both. He was a cousin to an earl, and only one life intervened. To be sure, it was a good life, that of a healthy young man of 25, his lordship's nephew, who might marry any day and raise up other intervening lives besides his own. Still it was something to be next but one to an earldom; if only on account of the family connection. And, in addition, Jack was handsome, attractive, and athletically distinguished. He had his blue both for "rugger" and for cricket, with a half-blue for golf thrown in. So that, taken altogether, he was a lad whom Lucy found it worth while to encourage—as far as she could do so without committing herself.

Now, I do not think that there are many sadder sights than that of a guileless, simple-hearted, generous fellow like Jack being entangled and befooled by a scheming siren; wasting the treasures of a loyal, manly nature upon one who was utterly incapable of appreciating them. And when Jack (who, as I have said, made me his confidante in everything) first told me of his love for Lucy Cleverly I could have cried my eyes out for the pity of the thing. In fact, afterwards, when I was alone I did nearly cry them out. Although at the time I had sufficient command of myself to bear the announcement with composure, and sufficient nous not to say a single word in disparagement of Miss Lucy. To have done so, to a lad in his condition, would have been worse than useless. Alas! poor boy! He must find her out for himself. That was the only way. There are some lessons that cannot be taught, only learned. This was one.

The occasion which the foolish boy took of declaring himself to Lucy was that of a cricket match, in the Parks. Jack told me all about it. The 'varsity were playing A. J. Webb's eleven. The Dark Blues were in, and—the wicket being fast and true—were having a merry time of it. Jack was sitting, in the attitude of a Turk or a tailor, at Lucy's feet, paying her considerably more attention than he was paying to the cricket.

"She was looking like an angel." (This was Jack's account.) "Her sweet face seemed to beam upon me with a heavenly radiance. She asked me, softly:

"'When do you go in, Mr. Fanshawe?'

"'Oh, I'm in eighth wicket,' I said.

"'But why do you go in so late?' she inquired.

"'Because I'm no bat, you know. I'm only played for my wicket-keeping.'

"'Ah! I wish you were a bat,' she murmured.

"'Why?'

"'Because I should love to see you make a big score, and be applauded by—all the people.'

(Ah, Miss Lucy! Couldn't I hear your very tones as you said that?)

"'You mean—do you take enough interest in me—to—care?'

"'Oh, Mr. Fanshawe, what a question!'

"There was a look in her eyes as she spoke," Jack confided to me, "that made me unable to restrain myself any longer. I said my one aim, my one thought, my one care, in life was to do what she wished. If she really wanted me to be a bat, a bat I would somehow become. I would spend the whole of my spare time practicing at the nets. I would hire the best professionals in England to bowl to me, on matting, all the winter. I would learn to play forward like Ranjitsinhji or Palairet; to play back like Abel or Shrewsbury. My late cuts should be modeled on the late cuts of Gunn. My driving should be as the driving of McLaren or Jackson."

"Upon my word, Jack," I could not help remarking, "you were somewhat reckless in your undertakings."

"So Lucy seemed to think," he admitted. "She hinted that promise was not quite the same thing as performance, and — and — seemed doubtful whether I loved her as much as I said I did."

"You had told her you loved her, then?"

"Of course I had. I sandwiched that in among the cricket. But I have not repeated it to you," he said, with a nervous laugh, "because — because—the sort of things one says when one is proposing — don't you know — well, they might sound a bit off when reported in cold blood."

"Very likely," I replied. "But when she expressed herself doubtful of the reality of your love, what did you say then?"

"I implored her to put me to the test and see."

"And what did she say to that?"

"She said she would; but she would be more lenient than to insist on so tremendous a test as I myself had suggested. She would not stand out for my becoming a compound Ranjitsinhji-Palairet - Abel - Shrewsbury-Gunn-McLaren-Jackson. She would be quite satisfied if I made 50 against Cambridge at Lord's."

"Oh, she would?"

"Yes. If I make my 50 it will be the same thing as if she had said 'yes' to my proposal."

"That was very kind of her," I remarked.

"Ah, there you go laughing at me. You think I haven't a chance of making 50. But you may prove mistaken, my dear girl."

"What! you think you are good for the runs?"

"I don't say that. But I'm going to make a big effort. Such an effort as no fellow ever made before. Of course, it's unlikely I shall succeed. But worse duffers than I have scored 50 before now. And, as I say, I'm going to have a good try."

"It sems to me," I could not help remarking, "that if Lucy really cares about you, it was rather a strange condition for her to impose."

I said no more. Jack was in too absurd a state to argue with. But of course I saw Lucy's game. It did not suit her to refuse him outright, and so to drive him from her circle of beaux; nor yet to accept him, and so commit herself. She had, therefore, turned it off in the manner described. And doubtless she had so managed it that even if Jack did fulfill the condition—which she must have known to be wildly improbable—she could make it out that it had never been seriously meant. In fact, it was a "head-I-win-tails-you-lose" sort of an agreement, by which simple Jack alone was meant to be bound.

Simple! Ah, that poor boy's crass, infantine simplicity! He took it quite au grand serieux. He never saw that he was being fooled; that his honest love was being played with, made a joke of. It really seemed inconceivable that anybody could be so blind. Yet so it was. He applied himself from that day forward to the improvement of his batting with all the earnestness of one whose life depended on it. I don't know how much money he spent on professionals at the nets; but — with the regular fees, and a trifle of five shillings "on the wicket"—it must have totted up to a handsome sum. His friends (none of whom were in the secret) could not make it out.

"What the dickens has come over the Fanner?" (Such was their regulation 'varsity version of Fanshawe's name.) "Does he think he's going to make a blooming bat of himself?" "'Pon my Sam, though, he's beginning to shape already. He did stop some teasers from Attewell in the match yesterday." "Yes, in a style of his own." "Style be hanged. He stopped 'em. Ranjy or Stoddart couldn't have done more." "Well, I always say that a wicket-keeper ought to be able to bat if he gives his mind to it. He's bound to have a good eye. And no one has so much practice in watching the ball from the pitch," etc.

These remarks I heard made at a luncheon in Commem. week. Of course, I said nothing. I was not going to give Jack away. But it did strike me as little short of marvelous that he should have taken that condition of Lucy Cleverly's in such deadly earnest. That he was improving himself as a batsman was beyond dispute. He made 25 not out that week against Lancashire, playing Mold and Briggs with considerable nerve. True, his style, as one of his critics had said, was a style of his own. But, after all, to succeed in your own style is a good deal better than to fail in some one else's. And that this 25, not out, was not a mere fluke, Jack showed by compiling a useful 30 against the M. C. C. at Lord's helping to put on 50 for the last wicket, and knocking off Mead and Rawlin. So that, after all, his chance of making 50 against Cambridge was hardly so extravagantly improbable as I had supposed. It was not likely, indeed. But it was possible. Would he succeed in ringing it off? I confess I hoped not.

Now that sounds an unkind thing to say. But circumstances had happened in the meantime which placed Lucy Cleverly's feelings toward Jack on a totally different footing. Ten days before the 'varsity match his cousin, the heir to the earldom, who was stationed with his regiment at York, met with a fatal accident while tent-pegging; and thus Jack's position underwent a complete and sudden change. His lordship was a childless widower of 75; his health was bad; his life precarious. To be his heir presumptive was the same thing as being his heir apparent. Jack had only to live a year or two to be sure of succeeding to the title and the settled estates. Of course, in this altered state of his fortunes, Lucy would jump at marrying him; and, therefore, (you will tell me) my uncharitable hopes about Jack's 50 were out of place, because now, 50 or no 50, that designing young woman would unquestionably accept him.

That is true. But—but—it seemed to me, the last few times I had seen him, there was something in Jack's manner suggestive (it may have been my fancy) that his ardor for Lucy was a trifle cooled. Perhaps he had heard something. Perhaps—but there! I would not indulge in speculations.

We were in town, of course, for the 'varsity match. Jack dined with us on the preceding evening.

"I had an invite from the Cleverlys," he told me, confidentially. "But I thought would rather come here."

"Why?" I inquired, smiling. "I should have thought that Lucy's magnetic attraction—"

"Now, don't laugh at a fellow, Maudie, I say? A chap's bound to do his best for his side in a 'varsity match—isn't he?"

"Of course."

"And a bargain's a bargain—isn't it?"

"That depends," I replied, catching what I believed to be his meaning, "where there has been genuine good faith on both sides."

"Ah," he said, shaking his head gravely, "a man of honor is always bound by his word. Well, well, very likely I shall put up Trundletop's first ball in the slips. But—but—if runs are wanted I shall do my level best to make 'em, Maudie. A gentleman must play the game, you know, old girl."

At that moment papa, who had been snoozing, woke up, and began to discuss Herbert Spencer's latest publication. So that was an end of confidential talk with Jack. I did hope, however, that the possibility he had mentioned would come to pass, and that he would put up Trundletop's first ball in the slips.

Now, I am not going to give you a full account of that 'varsity match. For one thing, I don't think I could if I would—cricket reporting being out of my line. For another, it would be superfluous; all that is material is contained in the extract given below, which I have "lifted" from the following Thursday's Telegraph:

"Wanting 251 to win, Oxford entered on their second innings punctually at three o'clock. From the start runs come rapidly, and when at the end of an hour and a half 150 went up, without loss, the match looked as good as over. At this point, however, the Oxford captain succumbed to a very fast one from Trundletop, and after his departure wickets fell with startling rapidity. * * * With 165 on the board and six men out it now looked like a good thing for Cambridge. It was at this point that Fanshawe and A. N. Other came together. Both batsmen resisted the attack with unexpected determination; the dark-blue wicket-keeper, in particular, who recently seems to have developed a latent talent for batting, stopped several balls that might have bowled anybody. Slowly, but surely, the score mounted. The second century was hoisted, amid cheers, when the innings had been in progress for two hours and a half. Then the rate of scoring increased; 210, 220, 230, 240 went up in rapid succession. It seems now as if the runs would be hit off without further loss, but with 250 on the board—the match being then a tie—Fanshawe was out to a very tame stroke in the slips, off a long hop from Trundletop. The retiring batsman had scored 49. It cannot be said that his style was particularly taking; but he deserves the highest praise for the nerve and determination which he had displayed at a critical juncture. By helping Other to put on 85 for the seventh wicket, he undoubtedly won the match for his side. The single wanted was quickly obtained, and Oxford remained victors of a memorable encounter by three wickets."

Jack and a few other friends dined with us that evening at Earle's court. After dinner we paired off. I found myself alone with Jack. The first thing I said was:

"Oh, Jack! I was afr—I mean, I thought you would make your 50 today. But you—you—played splendidly. You—you—won the match."

"Yes," he answered. "Only we might have beaten 'em by four wickets instead of three."

"What do you mean, Jack? You—you didn't get out on—on—purpose, did you?"

"Well, you see, old girl, when I went in things were very critical, and I had to do my level best; but when the scores were a tie and the match was safe, I came to the conclusion that I wouldn't, after all, complete my 50. So, instead of clouting that shocking long-hop to the boundary, as I might easily have done, I put up a simple little catch to third man—"

I did not affect to misunderstand him. I simply said: "Your feelings towards Lucy have undergone a remarkably sudden change, Jack."

"Not so very sudden," he replied. "I have been finding the young lady out for some time. But it was not only that I have discovered the worthlessness of Miss Lucy. I—I—have discovered the worth of somebody else, and—"

"It must have been a dreadful disappointment to Lucy," I murmured, my heart beginning to beat with a painful rapidity.

"Ah," he said. "Girls who play that sort of game must expect to be caught in the slips. I was a fatuous ass ever to let her have an inning when I had such a much better player to take in with me. However," he added, "the best bats generally do go in first wickets, and—and—if I can persuade a certain person to come in first wicket now, I—I believe it will take something superlative in the way of bowling to get her out."

The certain person was persuaded. She is still "not out." And she sees every prospect of occupying the crease till the call of "time."—London Truth.