

AS EASY AS LYING.

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From my youth upward I have always had an extreme reverence for truth, with a corresponding contempt for falsehood. This admiration for truth was not an innate virtue, but was one carefully inculcated by my respected father, who, as soon as my understanding was ripe enough to grasp his meaning, constantly repeated this celebrated maxim: "Tell the truth and shame the devil." I am not sure that the mere reiteration of these words would have had the desired effect upon my infantile mind had not any slight divergence on my part from the principles they are supposed to teach been invariably followed by severe flagellation.

As I grew older, and thought more, two things about this maxim and its enunciator occupied much of my meditations: Firstly, why telling the truth should shame the devil (a point upon which even now I have arrived at no satisfactory conclusion); and secondly, why, when such admirable precept was always on my father's lips, he did not enforce it by example; for he certainly was the greatest—well exaggerator, to put it respectfully—it was ever my fate to encounter. Be this as it may, I grew up the very embodiment of truth; and never did any, even the slightest, deviation from its path sully my lips or my thoughts until after I was engaged to be married. Circumstances which I shall relate then hurried me into a very whirlwind of falsehood, the result of which was nearly to destroy my fair name, and all my hopes of happiness.

I resided in the county town of X—where my father, and my grandfather, and Heaven knows how many generations of my ancestors, had resided before me; in truth, in a true spirit of conservatism, I continued to reside there simply because they had, not from any particular advantages held out by the place itself; and I became, at the age of twenty-four, matrimonially contracted to the sister of my college chum, Charles Darley. To enter into a description of the charms of my intended would be foreign to my story. Be kind enough to take it for granted that she was perfection in every particular, but one—she told fibs; and on this point we had many disputes—she, as a general rule, acknowledging her fault, and promising better behavior for the future.

One day, after some graver peccadillo than usual of this description, I read Annie a long and severe lecture on her evil propensity. I pointed out first, its immorality, then its meanness, as uselessness, as being invariably discovered. There was nothing clever in

it; for any body, however weak in intellectual powers, could tell a lie with the greatest ease. "Dean Swift," said I, waxing oratorical "has himself made many caustic remarks on the futility of falsehood. Did he not say that, considering how easy lying was, it was a wonder people did not do better?"

"Yes," said Annie; "but how can he judge of the fibs (I don't like the word lies—it is harsh) which have never been detected?"

Strange this had hadn't struck me before; and was rather a poser. While pausing to recover from its effects, Miss Annie arose and thus held forth:

"Now just listen to me a few moments. I utterly and totally deny the justice of any of your strictures upon white lies. The practice is neither mean nor useless. Mean! How many friends do we save from pain, danger, mortification by a harmless fib? Useless! Why, what a world to live in this would be if our thoughts were always freely expressed, un-cloaked by what you are pleased to call lying, but what is generally termed *courtesy*! And as to its being easy, just you try it—just you see whether you can, at a moment's notice, forge a fib so probable as to be accepted as truth, and be devoid of disapproval hereafter; so naturally spoken as to raise no suspicion and yet of such a nature as to screen you from any difficulty into which the outspoken truth would have led you; and lastly—this is the most important of all—implicate nobody but yourself. I say just try it!"

So saying, she left the room. I sat speechless. Lying recommended to me as an amiable virtue! It took me some time to recover. At last I rose and walked home, revolving what she had said in my mind. "Not easy to tell a fib!" thought I. Rubbish! Nothing so easy. I'll prove it by taking her advice. So I resolved to tell an untruth, just to prove the soundness of my principles. What should be the subject of it? It then struck me that the proper and fairest way to test the matter was to wait until the occasion presented itself, and invent the story on the spur of the moment. To give some color to my lie, I staid away from Annie one whole evening, and went, not without trepidation, to call on her the ensuing morning. I was not a little bothered to find Charlie with his sister, as well as one or two other people of my acquaintance. (There was no mamma in the case, for Darley and his sister were orphans.)

"Why, where were you last night?" chanted a general chorus.

"I—why, I—I went out for a ride!"

"A ride!" sung out Charley. "Why I thought you were no equestrian. Which way did you go?"

I hadn't bargained for this sort of thing. I found myself under the necessity of backing up my miserable attempt at falsehood by other fibs. I

felt half inclined to draw back; but no. I wanted to read Annie a lesson; so I floundered on.

"Where did I go? Why, let me see. I went—"

"Why, sure'y," said Annie "you didn't ride with your eyes shut; although from what you have told me of your horsemanship, I shouldn't wonder if you had."

This taunt aroused me. "I rode into Mr. Ford's park."

"No, did you?" said one of my friends present. "I walked that way myself yesterday evening. Strange I didn't see you. I entered the gate nearest to the town."

"Oh that accounts for it," answered I, boldly. "I rode on and entered by the southern gate."

"The deuce you did!" said Charley. "Why, man, it has been nailed up for the last seven months, but I suppose you *mean* the gate near the house."

"Ah, just so," acquiesced I, for fear of again putting my foot in it.

"Well, I declare," said Annie, "I am astonished. Whose horse did you ride?"

"Whose horse? Oh, Gardiner's."

"What, the white mare?" asked Charley, with a strange grin.

"Yes," returned I, rushing desperately on my fate, "the white mare."

Master Charley looked at me for a few moments in a way I didn't much like, and then left the room, whistling melodiously. Delighted at his departure, I attempted to turn the conversation into other channels, but in vain. I had set the ball rolling, and nothing could now curb the curiosity of my friends.

"About what time did you start?" asked one.

"Just at dusk," answered I, as I thought, with deep diplomacy, for this would account for no one having seen me in the streets and recognized me.

"At dusk!" exclaimed Annie. "What an extraordinary creature you are! You have never ridden at all within the memory of anybody here; and when you do go, you chose a horse known to be restive, and set out at dusk along a lonesome road. Was the old misanthrope's house looking as dull and gloomy as ever?"

"The—eh? oh yes! certainly; very dark—quite doleful; but pray let us change the subject. Surely it is nothing so strange for a man living in a country town to take an evening ride?"

"No," answered one of my friends (confound him!); "but when one goes at dusk in the direction of a house known to be almost the prison of a very pretty girl—well, if you were not engaged, I should say it was decidedly suspicious."

I saw Annie change color; and, though I felt that my experiment had plunged me into unforeseen difficulties, I was determined to carry the thing through; but I didn't see my way as