

THE LOVE LETTERS OF A LIAR.

BY HOWARD FIELDING.

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It is said that truthfulness means nothing to a Chinaman; that he has no moral law which enjoins veracity. With this in mind I once asked my friend Johnny Reed if any of his known ancestors were Chinese. He replied in the negative, but I failed to believe him—in fact, it is foolish to believe anything that he says.

I have spoken of him as my friend. That means merely that we were together a great deal, being associated in many vast enterprises which existed wholly in his imagination and his credulity. For despite my rational conviction that Johnny could not tell the truth acting as if there were something in what he said.

He was in everything a delusion and a snare. Even his looks lied, for he produced the effect of being handsome, and really he was not even good looking. You may know he was a dangerous man to the opposite sex which loves what seems rather than what is. Reed could not readily attract, and he was such a conscienceless and habitual liar that the mere fact of his not loving a woman would naturally make him tell her that he did.

He displaced my friend, Horace Taylor, in the affections of a most estimable young woman, Miss Gertrude Ware, and I am convinced he did it by the simple process of telling her that he was the greatest and best man alive and making her believe it.

I don't know that Miss Ware was ever really in love with Taylor, but I am sure she would have been, and nothing better could have happened to her, for Horace is one man in ten thousand. That he loved her was written on his brow. To do so was natural, for she was in all respects lovable.

I believe that even Reed felt an emotion as nearly sincere as his nature would permit. I judge so from the fact that he used to keep engagements with her, a thing he never did with any one else. Indeed he could not always do so even with her, for I saw him playing billiards with Jack Bliss in the Aldine parlors' one evening when I knew that he had positively promised to escort Miss Ware to the home of some poor people in whom she was charitable interested.

It was 11 o'clock when I saw Reed and Bliss in the billiard room. They were having a desperate struggle, with money in the corners of the table, and I learned that they had been at it since 4 in the afternoon, dining upon sandwiches furnished by the Aldine management.

I had looked in to find Horace Taylor, who had said he might meet me there after the theater. He was not in sight, so I walked around the corner to the entrance of the Aldine apartments, wherein Taylor, Reed and Bliss had bachelor apartments.

Horace was just coming out to keep his appointment with me, but on hearing that Reed was in the billiard room he lost his inclination for the sport and suggested instead that we should go up to his rooms and have a quiet smoke.

I had not realized how hard Horace was hit until that evening. We talked for about two hours, he extolling Miss Ware and I "roasting" Reed, and I think Horace was cheered up considerably. He was not the man who would roast a rival, so I had to do it for him.

"This looks like a piece of the grate." And he took a bit of charred paper out of the fire.

"No," said I; "it's here." I picked out of an overturned wastebasket lying between us an envelope addressed to Miss Ware.

"That's the first one I wrote her," said Reed. "It's no good. Told her I was sick from eating some candy sent to me through the mail. That's a chestnut. The second one was much better."

"What pleasant fiction did that contain?" I asked.

"Do you know that coal hole in the sidewalk just to the left of the entrance of this building?"

I admitted having noticed it.

"Well, about a year ago one of the elevator men went out in a hurry one evening and stepped right into that hole. They were putting in coal, and the cover was off. He went down a short 30 feet to the subcellar and came out perfectly black and with two ribs broken."

"And you wrote her that had happened to you?" said I. "Why, she'll know that the Aldine management wouldn't be getting in coal at this time of year. Understand, I don't condemn the lie on moral grounds, which you wouldn't comprehend, but"

"Neither do you comprehend the present situation," he replied. And then he went on to tell me a wild, extravagant falsehood; that his breaking engagement with Miss Ware was entirely for her sake and was founded upon considerations which were of tremendous importance and which he was not privileged to divulge. If she had gone upon the charitable errand which she planned, the gravest results would have followed, and he had prevented her in the only possible way.

No one who doesn't know Reed could believe that such rampant nonsense could be plausibly presented, yet at one point of his story even I was led to suspect that there might be a germ of truth in it. That was Reed's specialty—to tell a falsehood in such a way that the hearer might well suspect it to be false and would yet believe that the truth was in it, remotely for some vast important and, villainously secret motive.

"I'm rather glad I burned that letter," said Reed as he took the other one out of my hand and made a bad shot at the grate with it. "I'll write a better one and describe a real occurrence."

He sat down at his desk and wrote with incredible speed.

"As I was passing that deathtrap crossing at Thirty-fourth street this evening," said he, folding the letter, "a little girl tried to get away from a Sixth avenue trolley and ran right in front of a hansom. I jumped for her and pulled her out of danger, but the shaft of the cab hit me in the back and hurt me quite badly. The little girl was not injured, but she was scared almost to death and yelled like an Indian. To pacify her I hired the cab that had done the damage and sent the child to her home on the east side."

"Of course," he said, "I have had to represent the injury to myself as rather more serious than it was, but otherwise the story is true in every detail."

I merely groaned. It was useless to say anything.

Reed sealed up his letter, addressed and stamped it and rose to go.

"Wait here for me, old man," said he. "I've got something important to say to you. I'll be back in half a minute. Here's a cigar—a good one, too, one of a lot that General Ludlow sent me from Havana."

I recognized the cigar as a brand sold in the Aldine billiard room, but I did not say so. Reed rushed away, and I sat smoking for at least a quarter of an hour. Then Bliss came along.

"Waiting for Reed?" he asked.

"Yes," said I. "He's gone out for half a minute."

"I heard him raising the dence a while ago about a letter to Miss Ware that he thought he might have dropped in the vestibule," said Bliss. "Did he find it?"

"No," I replied shortly. The whole subject disgusted me, and I did not care to speak of it. "I'm going home. It's nearly 2 o'clock. Shall you wait here?"

"Why, yes, I guess so," he replied. "I want to see Johnny for half a minute."

"Good night," said Bliss, stretching himself in an easy chair.

The next evening, when I dropped in to Roland's for dinner, I saw Horace Taylor sitting alone by one of the tables. To my great surprise there was a quart bottle of champagne in a cooler beside him. Such indulgence was entirely beyond anything that I knew about Horace.

When he saw me, he jumped up and grabbed my hand as Damon might have done to Pythias in the most thrilling moment of their friendship.

"I'm mighty glad to see you," he cried. "Sit down."

"Any one else coming?" I asked, glancing at the cooler.

Horace blushed.

"No," he said; "I'm only celebrating, and as I was alone I could think of nothing better than that bottle of foolishness. By heaven, I am glad you came."

"Why, what's the matter, my boy?" I inquired.

"I'll tell you the whole story," said he. "I went to call on Miss Ware this afternoon, and she spoke of her disappointment in not going on her errand of charity last evening. I don't know what got into me, but I said impulsively that Reed was careless about his engagements. It's the only time I've ever said anything against him in her presence, and I did it very mildly. I assure you."

"An honorable fellow," said I. "I will always forbear to speak evil of another fellow when the plain truth might prevent a good woman from marrying a rascal."

"Honor's a queer thing, I'll admit," he said, "and it really doesn't seem to have been made in the interest of women. However, I did go so far as to say that Johnny was careless about his engagements."

"Upon that she proceeded to defend him in a manner that put me very much in the wrong. Mr. Reed was a most scrupulous man. If he had failed to keep his engagement, there must be some good reason for it."

"At that moment in came the butler with letters for Miss Ware on a most beautiful salver."

"This is from Mr. Reed," she cried, taking the topmost letter from the pile. "Now we shall know all about it. Pardon me." And she proceeded to read.

"I saw her face grow pale and then flush."

"He has been hurt!" she cried. "Hurt saving a poor little girl from injury at a crossing! Didn't you know of this, living in the same building with him?"

"No," I replied; "we see little of each other."

"Meanwhile the butler was standing like a statue, holding the tray. He ventured to cough discreetly, and Miss Ware saw that there were more letters."

"Another from Mr. Reed!" she cried and opened it with feverish haste.

"Why, what is this?" she murmured. "He has fallen into a coal hole! How terribly unfortunate after being hurt by the cab!"

"There's another letter, miss," said the butler.

"And, by jingo, that was from Reed, too, and it said that somebody had sent him poisoned candy through the mails! In utter confusion of mind Miss Ware showed me the three letters. Each of them named a separate excuse for not keeping the engagement with her, and each alleged that after the particular calamity detailed in it the unfortunate victim had taken to his bed and had been unable to get out of it."

"Mr. Taylor," said Miss Ware at last, "I want you to go down to the Aldine and ascertain the exact facts. And you must give me your most sacred word of honor to report exactly what you find!"

"I tried to beg off, but it was no use. It was a case of do it or lose her friendship forever. So I went down there. And this is what I found out: Reed wrote three letters. One of them he thought that he burned, but really he dropped it in the elevator, and one of the boys mailed it. Another was found on the floor of his room by Jack Bliss, who had heard of the loss of the letter and thought it was his duty to mail the one he found. The third was mailed by Johnny himself."

"When he went out to mail it, he met some fellows and staid with them so long that Miss, who was waiting in Johnny's room, gave him up and went to his own place."

"That's about the whole of it. Of course we who know Johnny can understand his three separate lies."

"I had to report to Miss Ware, and I did it without fear or favor, whereupon she wrote a note to Reed saying that three such fearful visitations of Providence in one evening were evidently meant as a warning to him that he must make no more engagements with her—indeed, it would be safer if he did not even see her again, since stern fate was so much opposed."

"She sent that by a messenger boy. Am I meant to rejoice? Perhaps so. Anyhow it's a luxury after having shielded the liar to my own injury so long."

FARM, ORCHARD AND GARDEN.

BY J. S. TRIGG.

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Correspondence Solicited.

Texas will show up with a crop of cotton worth \$100,000,000 this year.

When a turkey steals her nest, some neighbor is very likely to steal her brood.

That's the way it always goes—just as soon as the berries get ripe the sugar trust puts up the price of sugar.

We would like to know why the Lord made the curculio want to lay its measly egg in the best varieties of plums.

Always thorns among the roses, for here, just as the strawberry season ends, along come the hay fever and the sniffles.

There may be something prettier than a Jack rose in the garden these bright June mornings, but if there is we can't see it.

A bushel of Iowa corn would buy a bushel of New York state pears this year if it were not for the railroads' share in the transaction.

It is the cultivation of the crop after the weeds are all killed which is a real pleasure to the cultivator and a boon to the growing crop.

If you have an old stag ram which you know is of no use to ship to Chicago, don't try to work it off on your home community as spring lamb.

You see that your boys have a good Fourth of July. With corn at 35 cents you can afford to give the boy more than a quarter to celebrate his country's independence.

The painful blotches caused by Ivy poisoning may be speedily relieved by wetting a piece of bread with water and dusting with washing soda, placing it over the scald.

It is all right for the man to insist upon having meals at the farm home ready on time, and it is also all right for the wife and mother to insist upon the men being on hand when the meal is ready.

In the summer kitchen is always lurking when the gasoline stove is carelessly handled. Foolish and careless women cannot change the law which governs the explosive hydrocarbons.

When pianos and organs find a ready sale among the farmers, it may be safely assumed that times are easy out on the grass. More pianos were sold last year than for the six years previously.

Kansas leads off for the crop season of 1900 with an 80,000,000 bushel crop of wheat and wants thousands of men to help save it. Following the wheat will be a 250,000,000 bushel crop of corn, and we recall the time when we passed the hat for Kansas.

The proposed German legislation against meat products is only as canned goods and sausage, which constitute but a small part of our exports to that country. It may be that this adverse legislation is entirely in the interest of the horse meat sausage of Germany.

The municipal ordinances of the city of St. Petersburg, in Russia, prohibit the carrying of a whip by the cabmen of the city, and still some of the finest and most high spirited horses in all the world are to be found in that city. The horse is there treated better than the man.

The man who put \$5 worth of eggs into a \$25 incubator and for three weeks has been broken of his sleep to watch the machine which at last turns him out a couple of mealy, motherless chicks has troubles in his own and needs two languages in which to express his feelings.

The trouble may come from a hail storm or from a cyclone or from a stroke of lightning or from a lantern knocked over by a cow in the barn, and it does come in all of these ways, and an insurance policy which will cover the loss is a good thing to have when the trouble comes.

Naturally men will always put the poor apples in the middle of the barrel, and the best berries on the top of the box, but all the same the men who make the most money from their fruit don't do this sort of dirty work. It is more honorable and pays better to sell the poor fruit to the glucose jam makers and let the fraud be sold in a bunch.

Give your boy an acre of land to work on some part of the farm and let him do it all his own way and have for his own the proceeds of such crop as he may raise. He will make some blunders, of course, but his experience will be worth a good deal. For such an acre some special crop, such as melons, popcorn, strawberries or potatoes, should be grown. You try it and see how quickly the boy will become interested in finding out all about the crop which he will try to raise and how to care for and market it to the best advantage.

We notice with regret that weeds of all sorts are almost entirely exempt from the ravages of insects. It is probably this thing which does something to make them weeds. Here is, for instance, a wild rose, proof against wildew, slug, green worm and red spider, all of which beset a Jacquemont rose growing within two feet of it in the writer's garden.

The publication of the formula by which oleo is made has been a surprise to the oleo and to congress, which compelled such publicity. It is proved that it can be produced so very cheaply that more emphatically than ever is the demand being made that it shall not be allowed to pass itself off as butter. It is also shown that the people who are knowing users of it are entitled to very much lower prices on it.

A farmer in central Iowa recently drove a four horse team of draft horses into a country town and was offered an even \$1,000 for them by a local horse buyer. These were high grade Percherons and the sort of horses wanted by the breweries and wholesale houses of the large cities. For this grade of horses there will always be a good demand at good prices.

A year or two more and the rafting business of the Mississippi river will be a thing of the past. The pine timber has nearly all been cut on the northern tributaries of this river which is within hauling distance of the streams, and now the only way left is to build railroads into the uncut sections of timber and erect mills adjacent thereto, shipping out the lumber instead of the logs.

If oleo is the poor man's butter and was sold to him for what it cost to produce, with a reasonable profit added, and sold for just what it is, no one could have any just cause for complaint. But it is sold as butter, with the outrageous profit of not less than 10 cents a pound to the producer of the fraud. Nine-tenths of the oleo eaten is eaten by those who think and believe it is genuine butter.

The end of the strawberry season always comes all too soon, and the grower of this fruit who makes a specialty of late varieties which ripen after the bulk of the crop is marketed can always depend upon making a good thing out of his late berries, for people always want strawberries most just as the season ends. The Gandy berry is the latest fruiting variety we have tried, and, while not a large yielder, the fruit is exceptionally large and attractive.

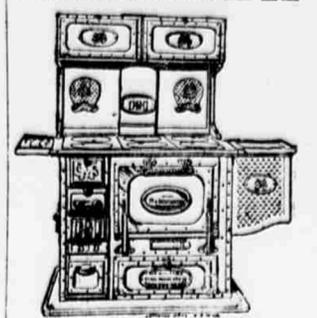
While we most cheerfully concede to woman a place, if she can make one, on the rostrum, in the courtroom, in the pulpit, as farm manager and grower of fine stock, as commercial traveler, physician and architect, we still draw the line on her playing butcher and running a meat market. An Indiana man proudly brags that his daughter can knock down a steer and take its hide off more quickly and in better shape than any man he ever employed for this purpose.

Laws kept closely out and well watered during the summer season need fertilizing every two years at least. About the best fertilizer is made by taking stable manure and, by turning it two or three times during the summer months, secure the destruction of all weed seeds in it. Then apply a liberal coat of such fertilizer in the fall, along in October, and let it remain on the lawn during the winter, raking the coarsest of it off in the spring. But, mind, it must be well heated and turned during the summer to kill the weed seeds; otherwise it will make bad work.

The opportunities for the acquirement of a practical agricultural education are better today than they have ever been before, and this, too, without the expense of attending some institution. There is an unlimited literature bearing on all phases of farm work—books, papers and magazines. There are study courses carried on by correspondence to be had in some of the states, through which nearly all the benefits of a course at an agricultural college may be obtained. Really all that is wanting now is the well defined purpose on the part of the man who should know more to acquire such knowledge as he needs.

Of course it is not so bad as to have the reputation for being dishonest, but all the same it never helps a man any to be known as "tight" in a community. While a man should look after his own interests in a businesslike manner, it does not pay him to split hairs to get his own or ignore the fact that every man owes something to the community at large. It is a nice thing to enjoy the reputation of being a generous man, as one having thought and care for his fellows less fortunate than he, as one who, living in the world, makes it the better for his having so lived. Such a reputation is far better than a gilt edged Bradstreet's rating and is a security which always pays a big dividend as long as the man lives.

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