

THE TWA TEXTS

ON the Sabbath evening after the riot I stood at the usual place awaiting my friends, and saw before they reached me that they had something untoward to tell.

“Was Mr Dishart on the riot?”

“I wish you would tell me what happened,” I said to Elspeth.

“So I will,” she answered, “if Waster Lunny would haud his wheesht for a minute. ‘You will find my text,’ he says in his piercing voice, ‘in the eighth chapter of Ezra.’”

"And at thae words," said Waster Lunny, "my heart gae a loup, for Ezra is an unco ill book to find; ay, and so is Ruth."

"I kent the books o' the Bible by heart," said Elspeth scornfully, "when I was a sax year auld."

"So did I," said Waster Lunny, "and I ken them yet, except when I'm hurried. When Mr Dishart gave out Ezra he a sort o' keeked round the kirk to find out if he had puzzled onybody, and so there was a kind o' a competition among the congregation wha would lay hand on it first. That was what doited me. Ay, there was Ruth when she wasna wanted, but Ezra dagont, it looked as if Ezra had jumped clean out o' the Bible."

"You wasna the only distressed crittur," said his wife. "I was ashamed to see Eppie M'Laren looking up the order o' the books at the beginning o' the Bible."

"Tibbie Birse was even mair brazen," said the post, "for the sly cuttie opened at Kings and pretended it was Ezra."

"None o' thae things would I do," said Waster Lunny, "and sal, I dauredna, for David Lunan was glowering over my shuther. Ay, you may scowl at me, Elspeth Proctor, but as far back as I can mind Ezra has done me. Mony a time afore I start for the kirk I take my Bible to a quiet place and look Ezra up. In the very pew I says canny to mysel', 'Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job,' the which should be a help, but the moment the minister gi'es out that awfu' book, away goes Ezra like the Egyptian."

"And you after her," said Elspeth, "like the weavers that wouldna fecht. You make a windmill of your Bible."

"Oh, I winnie admit I'm beat. Never mind, there's queer things in the world forby Ezra. How does flour-bread aye fall on the buttered side?"

"I will mind," Elspeth said, "for I was terrified the minister would admonish you frae the pulpit."

"He couldna hae done that, for was he no baffled to find Ezra himsel'?"

"Him no find Ezra!" cried Elspeth. "I hae telled you a dozen times he found it as easy as you could yoke a horse."

"The thing can be explained in no other way," said her husband doggedly, "if he was weel and in sound mind."

"Maybe the dominie can clear it up," suggested the post, "him being a scholar."

"Then tell me what happened," I asked.

"Godsake, hae we no telled you?" Birse said. "I thocht we had."

"As I said, Mr Dishart gave out Ezra eighth. Weel, I turned it up in a jiffy, and syne looked cautiously to see how Eppie M'Laren was getting on. Just at that minute I heard a groan, and there I saw a sicht that would hae made the grandest gape. The minister's face was as white as a baker's, and he had a sort of fallen against the back o' the pulpit, staring demented-like at his open Bible."

"And I saw him," said Birse, "put up his hand atween him and the Book, as if he thocht it was to jump at him."

"Twice," said Elspeth, "he tried to speak, and twice he let the words fall."

"That," says Waster Lunny, "the whole congregation admits, but I didna see it mysel', for a' this time you may picture me hunting savage-like for Ezra. I thocht the minister was waiting till I found it."

"Hendry Munn," said Birse, "stood upon one leg, wondering whether he should run to the session-house for a glass of water."

"But by that time," said Elspeth, "the fit had left Mr Dishart, or rather it had ta'en a new turn. He grew red, and it's gospel that he stamped his foot."

"He had the face of one using bad words," said the post. "He didna swear, of course, but that was the face he had on."

"I missed it," said Waster Lunny, "for I was in full cry after Ezra, with the sweat running down my face."

"But the most astounding thing has yet to be telled," went on Elspeth. "The minister shook himsel' like one wakening frae a nasty dream, and he cries in a voice of thunder, just as if he was shaking his fist at somebody——."

"He cries," Birse interposed cleverly, "he cries, 'You will find the text in Genesis, chapter three, verse six.'"

"Yes," said Elspeth, "first he gave out one text, and then he gave out another, being the most amazing thing to my mind that ever happened in the town of Thrums. What will our children's children think o't? I wouldna hae missed it for a pound note."

"Nor me," said Waster Lunny, "though I only got the tail o't. Dominie, no sooner had he said Genesis third and sixth than I laid my finger on Ezra. Was it no provoking? Onybody can turn up Genesis, but it needs an able-bodied man to find Ezra."

"He preached on the Fall," Elspeth said, "for an hour and twenty-five minutes; but powerful though he was, I would rather he had telled us what made him gie the go-by to Ezra."

"All I can say," said Waster Lunny, "is that I never heard him mair awe-inspiring. Whaur has he got sic a knowledge of women? He riddled them, he fair riddled them, till I was ashamed o' being married."

SIR JAMES M. BARRIE.

From "The Little Minister."

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