

## THE VICAR AND THE ANGEL.

### VI.

Now there are some things frankly impossible. The weakest intellect will admit this situation is impossible. The Athenæum will probably say as much should it venture to review this. Sunbespattered ferns, spreading beech trees, the Vicar and the gun are acceptable enough. But this Angel is a different matter. Plain sensible people will scarcely go on with such an extravagant book. And the Vicar fully appreciated this impossibility. But he lacked decision. Consequently he went on with it, as you shall immediately hear. He was hot, it was after dinner, he was in no mood for mental subtleties. The Angel had him at a disadvantage, and further distracted him from the main issue by irrelevant iridescence and a violent fluttering. For the moment it never occurred to the Vicar to ask whether the Angel was possible or not. He accepted him in the confusion of the moment, and the mischief was done. Put yourself in his place, my dear Athenæum. You go out shooting. You hit something. That alone would disconcert you. You find you have hit an Angel, and he writhes about for a minute and then sits up and addresses you. He makes no apology for his own impossibility. Indeed, he carries the charge clean into your camp. "A man!" he says, pointing. "A man in the maddest black clothes and without a feather upon him. Then I was not deceived. I am indeed in the Land of Dreams!" You must answer him. Unless you take to your heels. Or blow his brains out with your second barrel as an

escape from the controversy.

"The Land of Dreams! Pardon me if I suggest you have just come out of it," was the Vicar's remark.

"How can that be?" said the Angel.

"Your wing," said the Vicar, "is bleeding. Before we talk, may I have the pleasure--the melancholy pleasure--of tying it up? I am really most sincerely sorry...." The Angel put his hand behind his back and winced.

The Vicar assisted his victim to stand up. The Angel turned gravely and the Vicar, with numberless insignificant panting parentheses, carefully examined the injured wings. (They articulated, he observed with interest, to a kind of second glenoid on the outer and upper edge of the shoulder blade. The left wing had suffered little except the loss of some of the primary wing-quills, and a shot or so in the ala spuria, but the humerus bone of the right was evidently smashed.) The Vicar stanching the bleeding as well as he could and tied up the bone with his pocket handkerchief and the neck wrap his housekeeper made him carry in all weathers.

"I'm afraid you will not be able to fly for some time," said he, feeling the bone.

"I don't like this new sensation," said the Angel.

"The Pain when I feel your bone?"

"The what?" said the Angel.

"The Pain."

"Pain'--you call it. No, I certainly don't like the Pain. Do you have much of this Pain in the Land of Dreams?"

"A very fair share," said the Vicar. "Is it new to you?"

"Quite," said the Angel. "I don't like it."

"How curious!" said the Vicar, and bit at the end of a strip of linen to tie a knot. "I think this bandaging must serve for the present," he said. "I've studied ambulance work before, but never the bandaging up of wing wounds. Is your Pain any better?"

"It glows now instead of flashing," said the Angel.

"I am afraid you will find it glow for some time," said the Vicar, still intent on the wound.

The Angel gave a shrug of the wing and turned round to look at the Vicar again. He had been trying to keep an eye on the Vicar over his shoulder

during all their interview. He looked at him from top to toe with raised eyebrows and a growing smile on his beautiful soft-featured face. "It seems so odd," he said with a sweet little laugh, "to be talking to a Man!"

"Do you know," said the Vicar, "now that I come to think of it, it is equally odd to me that I should be talking to an Angel. I am a somewhat matter-of-fact person. A Vicar has to be. Angels I have always regarded as--artistic conceptions----"

"Exactly what we think of men."

"But surely you have seen so many men----"

"Never before to-day. In pictures and books, times enough of course. But I have seen several since the sunrise, solid real men, besides a horse or so--those Unicorn things you know, without horns--and quite a number of those grotesque knobby things called 'cows.' I was naturally a little frightened at so many mythical monsters, and came to hide here until it was dark. I suppose it will be dark again presently like it was at first. Phew! This Pain of yours is poor fun. I hope I shall wake up directly."

"I don't understand quite," said the Vicar, knitting his brows and tapping his forehead with his flat hand. "Mythical monster!" The worst thing he had been called for years hitherto was a 'mediaeval

anachronism' (by an advocate of Disestablishment). "Do I understand that you consider me as--as something in a dream?"

"Of course," said the Angel smiling.

"And this world about me, these rugged trees and spreading fronds----"

"Is all so very dream like," said the Angel. "Just exactly what one dreams of--or artists imagine."

"You have artists then among the Angels?"

"All kinds of artists, Angels with wonderful imaginations, who invent men and cows and eagles and a thousand impossible creatures."

"Impossible creatures!" said the Vicar.

"Impossible creatures," said the Angel. "Myths."

"But I'm real!" said the Vicar. "I assure you I'm real."

The Angel shrugged his wings and winced and smiled. "I can always tell when I am dreaming," he said.

"You--dreaming," said the Vicar. He looked round him.

"You dreaming!" he repeated. His mind worked diffusely.

He held out his hand with all his fingers moving. "I have it!" he said. "I begin to see." A really brilliant idea was dawning upon his mind. He had not studied mathematics at Cambridge for nothing, after all. "Tell me please. Some animals of your world ... of the Real World, real animals you know."

"Real animals!" said the Angel smiling. "Why--there's Griffins and Dragons--and Jabberwocks--and Cherubim--and Sphinxes--and the Hippogriff--and Mermaids--and Satyrs--and...."

"Thank you," said the Vicar as the Angel appeared to be warming to his work; "thank you. That is quite enough. I begin to understand."

He paused for a moment, his face pursed up. "Yes ... I begin to see it."

"See what?" asked the Angel.

"The Griffins and Satyrs and so forth. It's as clear...."

"I don't see them," said the Angel.

"No, the whole point is they are not to be seen in this world. But our men with imaginations have told us all about them, you know. And even I at times ... there are places in this village where you must simply take

what they set before you, or give offence--I, I say, have seen in my dreams Jabberwocks, Bogle brutes, Mandrakes.... From our point of view, you know, they are Dream Creatures...."

"Dream Creatures!" said the Angel. "How singular! This is a very curious dream. A kind of topsy-turvey one. You call men real and angels a myth. It almost makes one think that in some odd way there must be two worlds as it were...."

"At least Two," said the Vicar.

"Lying somewhere close together, and yet scarcely suspecting...."

"As near as page to page of a book."

"Penetrating each other, living each its own life. This is really a delicious dream!"

"And never dreaming of each other."

"Except when people go a dreaming!"

"Yes," said the Angel thoughtfully. "It must be something of the sort. And that reminds me. Sometimes when I have been dropping asleep, or drowsing under the noon-tide sun, I have seen strange corrugated faces just like yours, going by me, and trees with green leaves upon them, and

such queer uneven ground as this.... It must be so. I have fallen into another world."

"Sometimes," began the Vicar, "at bedtime, when I have been just on the edge of consciousness, I have seen faces as beautiful as yours, and the strange dazzling vistas of a wonderful scene, that flowed past me, winged shapes soaring over it, and wonderful--sometimes terrible--forms going to and fro. I have even heard sweet music too in my ears.... It may be that as we withdraw our attention from the world of sense, the pressing world about us, as we pass into the twilight of repose, other worlds.... Just as we see the stars, those other worlds in space, when the glare of day recedes.... And the artistic dreamers who see such things most clearly...."

They looked at one another.

"And in some incomprehensible manner I have fallen into this world of yours out of my own!" said the Angel, "into the world of my dreams, grown real."

He looked about him. "Into the world of my dreams."

"It is confusing," said the Vicar. "It almost makes one think there may be (ahem) Four Dimensions after all. In which case, of course," he went on hurriedly--for he loved geometrical speculations and took a certain pride in his knowledge of them--"there may be any number of three



dimensional universes packed side by side, and all dimly dreaming of one another. There may be world upon world, universe upon universe. It's perfectly possible. There's nothing so incredible as the absolutely possible. But I wonder how you came to fall out of your world into mine...."

"Dear me!" said the Angel; "There's deer and a stag! Just as they draw them on the coats of arms. How grotesque it all seems! Can I really be awake?"

He rubbed his knuckles into his eyes.

The half-dozen of dappled deer came in Indian file obliquely through the trees and halted, watching. "It's no dream--I am really a solid concrete Angel, in Dream Land," said the Angel. He laughed. The Vicar stood surveying him. The Reverend gentleman was pulling his mouth askew after a habit he had, and slowly stroking his chin. He was asking himself whether he too was not in the Land of Dreams.

## VII.

Now in the land of the Angels, so the Vicar learnt in the course of many conversations, there is neither pain nor trouble nor death, marrying nor giving in marriage, birth nor forgetting. Only at times new things begin. It is a land without hill or dale, a wonderfully level land, glittering with strange buildings, with incessant sunlight or full moon, and with incessant breezes blowing through the Æolian traceries of the trees. It is Wonderland, with glittering seas hanging in the sky, across which strange fleets go sailing, none know whither. There the flowers glow in Heaven and the stars shine about one's feet and the breath of life is a delight. The land goes on for ever--there is no solar system nor interstellar space such as there is in our universe--and the air goes upward past the sun into the uttermost abyss of their sky. And there is nothing but Beauty there--all the beauty in our art is but feeble rendering of faint glimpses of that wonderful world, and our composers, our original composers, are those who hear, however faintly, the dust of melody that drives before its winds. And the Angels, and wonderful monsters of bronze and marble and living fire, go to and fro therein.

It is a land of Law--for whatever is, is under the law--but its laws all, in some strange way, differ from ours. Their geometry is different because their space has a curve in it so that all their planes are cylinders; and their law of Gravitation is not according to the law of

inverse squares, and there are four-and-twenty primary colours instead of only three. Most of the fantastic things of our science are commonplaces there, and all our earthly science would seem to them the maddest dreaming. There are no flowers upon their plants, for instance, but jets of coloured fire. That, of course, will seem mere nonsense to you because you do not understand. Most of what the Angel told the Vicar, indeed the Vicar could not realise, because his own experiences, being only of this world of matter, warred against his understanding. It was too strange to imagine.

What had jolted these twin universes together so that the Angel had fallen suddenly into Sidderford, neither the Angel nor the Vicar could tell. Nor for the matter of that could the author of this story. The author is concerned with the facts of the case, and has neither the desire nor the confidence to explain them. Explanations are the fallacy of a scientific age. And the cardinal fact of the case is this, that out in Siddermorton Park, with the glory of some wonderful world where there is neither sorrow nor sighing, still clinging to him, on the 4th of August 1895, stood an Angel, bright and beautiful, talking to the Vicar of Siddermorton about the plurality of worlds. The author will swear to the Angel, if need be; and there he draws the line.

VIII.

"I have," said the Angel, "a most unusual feeling--here. Have had since sunrise. I don't remember ever having any feeling--here before."

"Not pain, I hope," said the Vicar.

"Oh no! It is quite different from that--a kind of vacuous feeling."

"The atmospheric pressure, perhaps, is a little different," the Vicar began, feeling his chin.

"And do you know, I have also the most curious sensations in my mouth--almost as if--it's so absurd!--as if I wanted to stuff things into it."

"Bless me!" said the Vicar. "Of course! You're hungry!"

"Hungry!" said the Angel. "What's that?"

"Don't you eat?"

"Eat! The word's quite new to me."

"Put food into your mouth, you know. One has to here. You will soon

learn. If you don't, you get thin and miserable, and suffer a great deal--pain, you know--and finally you die."

"Die!" said the Angel. "That's another strange word!"

"It's not strange here. It means leaving off, you know," said the Vicar.

"We never leave off," said the Angel.

"You don't know what may happen to you in this world," said the Vicar, thinking him over. "Possibly if you are feeling hungry, and can feel pain and have your wings broken, you may even have to die before you get out of it again. At anyrate you had better try eating. For my own part--ahem!--there are many more disagreeable things."

"I suppose I had better Eat," said the Angel. "If it's not too difficult. I don't like this 'Pain' of yours, and I don't like this 'Hungry.' If your 'Die' is anything like it, I would prefer to Eat. What a very odd world this is!"

"To Die," said the Vicar, "is generally considered worse than either pain or hunger.... It depends."

"You must explain all that to me later," said the Angel. "Unless I wake up. At present, please show me how to eat. If you will. I feel a kind of urgency...."

"Pardon me," said the Vicar, and offered an elbow. "If I may have the pleasure of entertaining you. My house lies yonder--not a couple of miles from here."

"Your House!" said the Angel a little puzzled; but he took the Vicar's arm affectionately, and the two, conversing as they went, waded slowly through the luxuriant bracken, sun mottled under the trees, and on over the stile in the park palings, and so across the bee-swarmed heather for a mile or more, down the hillside, home.

You would have been charmed at the couple could you have seen them. The Angel, slight of figure, scarcely five feet high, and with a beautiful, almost effeminate face, such as an Italian old Master might have painted. (Indeed, there is one in the National Gallery [Tobias and the Angel, by some artist unknown] not at all unlike him so far as face and spirit go.) He was robed simply in a purple-wrought saffron blouse, bare kneed and bare-footed, with his wings (broken now, and a leaden grey) folded behind him. The Vicar was a short, rather stout figure, rubicund, red-haired, clean-shaven, and with bright ruddy brown eyes. He wore a piebald straw hat with a black ribbon, a very neat white tie, and a fine gold watch-chain. He was so greatly interested in his companion that it only occurred to him when he was in sight of the Vicarage that he had left his gun lying just where he had dropped it amongst the bracken.

He was rejoiced to hear that the pain of the bandaged wing fell rapidly

in intensity.