

"Unfortunately for your argument, and fortunately for mine, you furnish another instance, almost in your next act."

"Pray tell me what it could have been, for I have not the most remote idea."

"Your husband and myself had been travelling since early morning without food, and, on our arrival, he proposed that we should have a lunch forthwith, and not wait for the regular dinner."

"Well, what has that to do with it?"

"Much. You put your lunch on a side table in front of a window, and dropped the curtain. When your husband objected to this arrangement, because it made the room gloomy, do you remember your answer?"

"I have not the least idea of what I said."

"Shall I refresh your memory, madam?"

"If you please,"

"You said you were ashamed that your table was so poorly supplied, and that you would be deeply mortified if any one passing along the walk would see it."

"And so I should. It is not often that our table is spread with such meagre fare."

"But there was nothing wrong or reprehensible in the furnishing of that table. According to my recollection, it was a good, wholesome and substantial lunch, to which any hungry man would be glad to sit down."

"Well, if there was nothing wrong about the collation, there was nothing reprehensible in lowering the curtain to prevent people from seeing the scanty fare."

"Not in the least; but pardon me for saying that your admission militates very strongly against your theory that we should keep secret only what is reprehensible."

"What next? I suppose, during the few days you have been with us, I must have furnished you with other arguments against myself."

"Doubtless. But perhaps it would be more pleasant to drop the subject where it is."

"No, I insist that you shall continue the argument. We have two swallows already; perhaps we shall have enough for a summer presently."

"Well, if you care to continue the subject, you must excuse me if I tell you that you have gone contrary to your theory, in repeated instances, but that you have been indoctrinating your children into the idea that to keep a secret not reprehensible in itself, may be very commendable."

"You astonish me! How or when have I taught them any such thing?"

"A day or two since you had the unpleasant task of correcting your little Willie for some misdemeanor."

"I did; but what has that to do with keeping secrets?" There was nothing secret in that transaction, as I can see."

"Permit me to explain. You punished the little fellow in an adequate manner. His brothers and sisters knew of the punishment, and you apprehended that, thoughtlessly, they might tell his playmates he had been corrected. You did not wish this revelation to be made, thus adding greatly to the punishment already inflicted, so you charged the other members of your family not to reveal the fact of Willie's correction to his school and playmates."

"I do not believe it was wrong for me to instruct my children not to publish Willie's disgrace."

"Neither do I. On the contrary, I hold that you would have been derelict in duty toward an erring child, had you not done so. The child would almost certainly have felt severely the disgrace, and, in the same degree, lost his self-respect had his youthful friends been cognizant of his misfortune."

"He surely would have done so."

"But do you not see that, in this, you give instructions to your children squarely opposed to your theory that secrecy is proof of wrong—that only where our actions are reprehensible do we keep them secret?"

"I see it plainly now, but never viewed the subject in this light before. What other instance in this line have you to quote?"

"With your leave, I will mention but one, and that is one in which you not only counseled your husband to keep a certain thing secret, but actually advised him to deceive those with whom he was doing business."

"What in the world is coming now? Of what crime have I been guilty?"

"Not exactly a crime—only an attempt at deception—that is all."

"Well, let us have it. I shall think presently that my whole life has been an inconsistency and a fraud."

"By no means madam. Only there is a little inconsistency running through every character, and you are human enough to partake of it. You remember the cold night when your husband had business which called him to town, and you were so assiduous in preparing him for the journey?"