

THE PRICE OF TEA

Jerry Parkman told me this story last Tuesday at the Men's Bible Study. He had recently returned from England after visiting his cousin, Lord Faversham, of London. Now, Jerry is generally a forthright man, but occasionally, exaggeration can tempt him. It is with that disclaimer that I absolve myself from any connection with the content.

Pastor Fred Anderson

My cousin, or as we more formally call him, Lord Faversham, is an interesting man. Learned, though not to the extent that you feel threatened by his knowledge, he maintains a calm, steady demeanor through some of the most stressful situations. One Friday afternoon, I sat in the parlor reading a leather-bound copy of Dickens' *Hard Times* when Lord Faversham and his elegant and equally unflappable wife, Lady Gloria, joined me.

"Jolly fine afternoon, Jerald," said Lord Faversham. "Wouldn't you say so, dear?"

"Yes, dear," replied Gloria.

“Don’t mind us, Jerald,” the owner of the house said. “We’re just about for a spot of tea and a round of current events with *The Times*. Would you care for a cup? I could have Annie bring an extra.”

“That’s okay,” I answered. “I’m fine.”

“So be it.”

When Annie came into the parlor with the tray of teapot and cups, she saw that there was another person in the room. “Begging your pardon, sir,” she said to the head of the household. “Does the gentleman care for some tea?”

“No, Annie, he’s tiptop. Thank you.”

Shortly after Annie left, Lord Faversham came upon an article in *The Times* that he felt obliged to share with his wife. “I see,” he said. “Now that’s interesting.”

“What’s that, dear?” asked Gloria.

“It says here that the rector of St. Ann’s reported having substantial problems with bats in the church belfry. After engaging the services of a pest control establishment to come out and get rid of them on Monday, more bats than ever showed up on Tuesday. The rector tried three other services, but they were all unsuccessful in ridding the belfry

of the bats. He called his friend, the rector over at St. Mark's in Darbeyton, for advice. His friend gave him the phone number for Pastor Walker at the local Lutheran church. The rector at St. Ann's called the Lutheran pastor, who promptly came over to St. Ann's. The Lutheran pastor went up into the belfry, and after sizing up the situation, immediately baptized and confirmed the bats, and they haven't seen them since."

"Can you imagine the embarrassment, having to call in a Lutheran?" said Lady Gloria.

"Indeed. I see here in Trevor's Gardening column that he's recommending you start your spring planting now. Shall we get James started on the new dogwood for the driveway?"

"Oh, he already did that this morning, dear," answered his wife. She got up and walked to the large bay window, where she said, "If you look out here, dear, you can see where he put it ... oh, my. Perhaps you should speak with James, dear."

"Why? What has the daft old gentleman done now?"

"It appears as though he's tied Rover to a wooden plank, dug a hole, and planted the plank in the hole."

“Ring the bell for me, will you, dear? And tell Annie to call in James, please.”

James entered the parlor and said, “Aye, you called for me, sir?”

“Yes, James. We asked you to plant the new dogwood down by the driveway.”

“Aye, that I did, sir.”

“No, James, you tied Rover the dog onto a plank and planted the plank.”

“Aye, sir. I planted the dog on a piece of wood.”

Raising his voice about ten decibels, Lord Faversham yelled, “James, we wanted the new dogwood tree planted, not Rover on a plank.”

“Aye, sir. You have another dog to plant?”

“No, James. A dogwood tree, not a dog on wood.”

“Aye, sir. You want me to buy another dog?”

Finally leaning over to about an inch from James’ ear, the master yelled, “No, James. Unplant the dogwood. Dig up the dogwood you just planted. I don’t want any dogwood planted.”

“Aye, sir.”

“Gloria, does Randolph have the car ready for our trip into town today?”

“Yes, as far as I know, dear.”

“Would you have Annie call him into the parlor?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Mr. Faversham, Randolph is here,” said Annie a few minutes later.

“Randolph, no Randolph, we’re behind you. A little to your left. Watch out for the table. Now, turnabout. There you go.”

“Yes, sir, you called.”

“Randolph, that’s my wife. I’m over to the left. There you go. Now, Randolph, does the car have plenty of petrol?”

“Yes, sir, it did.”

“What do you mean, it did?”

“Well, sir, I took it in at 8 o’clock this morning and filled it up completely. I used a little petrol to get back home, though. So, we would have to account for whatever was used between then and this noon when I got back home.”

“I don’t understand, Randolph. That’s four hours, and it only takes 15 minutes to get here from town.”

“Begging your pardon, sir, but I got lost several times.”

“I see, Randolph. Well, carry on.”

“Now, dear,” reminded his wife. “You know how easily this weather clouds up Randolph’s glasses.”

“I trust then that we shall hope the fog has lifted by the time we’re ready to go.”

“Yes, dear.”

“I say, Jerald, do you smell something?” asked Lord Faversham.

“Yes, it smells like smoke,” I answered.

“Gloria, do you smell smoke?”

“Yes, dear. Do you think the kitchen’s on fire again?”

“Ring Annie, please?”

“You rang for me, sir?” asked Annie, when she came into the parlor.

“Annie, is the kitchen on fire again?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Very well. Carry on.”

“Gloria, would you call the insurance company?”

“Yes, dear. What about the fire brigade?”

“Oh, they’ve probably seen it by now.”

Jumping up out of his chair in reaction to another article in *The Times*, Lord Faversham raised his voice unexpectedly, “They shan’t get away with this. Gloria, did you know they’re raising the price of tea again? I’ll put an end to this straightway. May I have the phone, please? Yes, Prime Minister Brown, this is Lord Faversham. What is the meaning of this, raising the price of tea again? What? ... Drought and all. Shortage of tea leaves? What are you chaps down there at Parliament going to do about it? What? Nothing you can do about it. Call who? I bloody well will, thank you. Can you believe it, Gloria?”

“The phone is ringing, dear. Do you want me to answer it?”

“Yes, by all means.”

“It’s for you, dear.”

“Well, who is it?”

“It’s the Lord.”

“Lord who?”

“It’s the Lord.”

“Hello. Yes, sir, it has been a while. You heard that I wanted to speak with you. Well, sir, it’s about the ... last Sunday ... well, last Sunday, they had the finals, you know. Yes, it was a close game, Angels 7 and Devils 6. As it should be, yes, sir ... what I wanted to talk to you about was the price ... the Sunday before last ... well, we were on holiday at that time. The Sunday before that ... well, I’m not sure I remember ... you do keep score? ... next Sunday? We shall endeavor to do that, sir ... yes, sir? Oh, yes, what I wanted to talk to you about was the ... the price of tea. It’s going up again, you know ... yes, sir, I will take that up with Parliament. Yes, sir, the first time I can. And thank, thank you, sir.”

“Gloria, next time He calls, tell him I’m not here.”

“Do you think that’s wise, dear?”

At that point, I left the parlor. What with all their talking and the smoke, I found it hard to read my book.