

**A FALSE VICAR,  
OR, "LIGHTS IN THE  
WORLD"**

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A False Vicar, Or, "Lights in the World" by Katharine A. Richards

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**KATHARINE A. RICHARDS**

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BY

KATHARINE A. RICHARDS

AUTHOR OF “HER FATHER’S HONOUR,” “LOCRETIA: A SEQUEL”  
“CURLY; OR, LIVING SHADOWS,” “THE HIDDEN BUTTERFLY”  
“THE TAILOR’S ALTERATION,” ETC. ETC.

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A FALSE VICAR



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## CHAPTER I

### THE HOUSE OF EVERSHAM

"A mine of wealth, the Bible is,  
For rich or poor, for great or small," &c.

It was a pleasant picture for any eyes to rest upon, and so thought the Rev. Tracy Sliden, who was the owner of a pair of keen orbs of a dangerous hue, which had a subtle look in them, and wore varied expressions at different times as seemed most suitable to the owner. Just now the eyes of the—falsely so-called—"reverend" gentleman emitted both an irritable and wolfish glance as they took in the fair scene before him—the stately Manor of Eversham, with its marble pillars and terraces, its goodly park with the startled deer, the grand old trees under which walked the only daughter of the house, known for miles round as "the gentle Agnes." A large St. Bernard ambled contentedly by her side, his noble head, peculiar gait, and bear-like haunches—in paradoxical fashion—silently proclaiming his valuable breed. As the ex-tutor advanced, the creature gave vent to an ominous growl.

"Down, Philo, clumsy dog. Can you not distinguish



a friend, sir?" said Agnes Eversham playfully, as she patted the huge animal affectionately with her left hand, while she cordially held out her right one to Mr. Sliden.

"How do you do, Mr. Sliden? Shall I walk with you to the house, or will you go in and find my father and the boys?—your boys, I ought to say, since you so kindly undertook their education when our dear mother died."

"Miss Agnes, I have often felt sorry that privilege was not extended to yourself," responded the Vicar of Eversham, as he glanced rather uneasily, if not angrily, at the little pocket Bible she had been reading so intently as to be unaware of his approach until warned of his presence by the low growl of the dog, Philo, a birthday gift from her younger brother.

"But, sir, what book could I substitute in its place? I assure you, my late mother valued this Bible beyond all her earthly possessions, and I think you know what valuable jewels she had?"

"All of which are mere baubles, my dear young lady, believe me. Now, the Bible needs careful consideration, being no ordinary book, as you know—needs special wisdom and help from those who have made it their particular study. But I can help you here, Miss Agnes, by lending you some books which will aid you in your ardent quest for spiritual instruction and guidance. On my return to the Vicarage I will at once pack and send on to you a small parcel of books, which will prepare your young mind for deeper truths."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Sliden, I will take the greatest care of them," said the artless girl, with a bright smile as frank as herself; while the quondam

tutor turned away towards the house where he was soon in the library with Sir James Eversham, the pompous father of Agnes and her two brothers, Frederick and Philip.

"Well, Mr. Sliden, so you have returned to Old England again; let me express the hope that you are better in health, and ready once more to take up your clerical duties on my estate? How did you leave Italy looking?" queried the baronet, as he extended two fingers to the former tutor of his sons with careless indifference.

"Many thanks, Sir James, for your kind inquiries, to which I am happy to respond that my general health is vastly improved, my spiritual condition—I humbly hope—particularly so; for I have had the extreme privilege of an audience with his Holiness. As to Italy, she is fairer than ever."

"What! conversed with the Pope, have you, Mr. Sliden? Well, it is more than I have ever done, notwithstanding all my broad acres. But I cannot say I should count it a particular honour were I, as you are, a clergyman of the Church of England," snapped the testy old baronet.

What a host of cunning was hidden in the depths of the heart and eyes of Mr. Sliden, as he replied deferentially, "There is all the difference in the world, Sir James, between a rich baronet of honourable family and an obscure clergyman, whose pleasures necessarily are very few and far between. His Holiness was delighted to hear of the improvements you have so graciously allowed me to make in the church on your noble estate; and he expressed the hope that as you were—at present, at all events—unable for the fatigue

of a long journey, he might one day have the extreme pleasure of thanking you, in the person of Mr. Frederick, if you will allow me some future day to take him to the Vatican as your representative? His Holiness likewise desired his blessing upon you, Sir James, for your generous contributions and noble efforts to beautify the church for the good of mankind."

"Ha! tut, tut, I like to have all things respectable on my estate, Mr. Sliden, as you know," said Sir James with a self-satisfied air; but he was secretly pleased nevertheless, as the Vicar had intended him to be.

"How have you liked the Rev. Basil Clifford during my absence, Sir James?" inquired Mr. Sliden suspiciously.

"Why, to say the truth, I have not been three times at church during the six months you have been on sick leave, owing to this gouty foot of mine and occasional heart trouble. He seems an earnest young fellow, and strange to say, turns out to be a distant relative of my family. He never tires of one subject, however."

"And what subject may that be, pray, Sir James?"

"'The finished work of Christ.' And he objects to your altar in our church, sir."

Mr. Sliden started, then somewhat abruptly took leave of the baronet and went in search of his former pupils.

The reflections of the two gentlemen expressed to the full the character and nature of each, and while Sir James in his pomposity mused, "The upstart inquisitiveness of that tutor fellow, to dare to question me as to my likes or dislikes, and of my own relative, too. Sliden by name and sly one by nature you are, my good man. 'Pon my word, I infinitely prefer young