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J. Darwin

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One of the most remarkable passages in "The Letters of Charles Darwin" (Macmillan), is the passage in which the great scientist speaks of his strange penchant for fibbing about the age of mice or men. In Darwin's case no doubt the fibbing was the result of a vivid imagination, which sought some outlet for its creations, but in the light of later years, when he was known to all the world as the most scrupulous of investigators, whose passion for absolute truth could not be surpassed, the passage reads strangely enough. In quoting it I hope it will not lead every mother of a fibbing boy to believe that her darling is a great scientist in embryo.

"I was in these days," he says, "a very great story-teller—for the pure pleasure of exciting attention and surprise. I stole fruit and hid it for the same motives, and injured trees by hacking them for smaller ones. I ~~was already very much~~ without saying I had seen a pheasant or some strange bird (feathered history books) these few, when not detected, I presume, excited my attention, as I recollect them vividly, not connected with shame, though some I do, but of something which, by having produced a great effect on my mind, gave pleasure like a tragedy. I recollect when I was speaking at Mr. Case's inventing a whole fabric to show how fond I was of speaking the truth. My invention is still as vivid in my mind, that I could almost fancy it was true, did not memory of former shame-tell me it was false."