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OUR INSINCERITY.



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OUR INSINCERITY.

MOST of us are insincere—frequently from laudable motives, sometimes from cowardice or indolence. St. Bernard found out that he was “never less alone than when alone,” and many of us early discover that we are never less at home than when at home, and that in more senses than one “there is no place like home”!

Adolescents of both sexes are generally delighted to get away from home, to shake off but for a few hours the unavoidable restraints of the home-circle, and say what they really think and feel without fear of censure or admonition.

Unquestionably young people as well as older folk require to be both censured and admonished, but it must be admitted that if censure and admonition, to say nothing of derision and contempt, follow the free expression of opinions, the probability is that they will be repressed altogether or reserved for less scrupulous ears. Young women who have less easy access to other circles, frequently become from the mere force of circumstances accomplished hypocrites, better understood and better appreciated by some casual acquaintance than by their nearest and dearest relatives. The domestic felicity of England is very much vaunted; it may possibly bear a favourable comparison with that of other nations, but the private experience of most of us can supply such a formidable array of dismal exceptions, that the other

side of the question is likely to fade out of sight. If you wish to form a fair opinion of Mr. Brown and his grown-up son, you must not invite them together, for neither of them can come out in his true colours in the presence of the other, and though from long habit they may appear quite at ease when together, you will find out when you see them apart that they are conscientious Jesuits, each bent upon concealing his real opinions from the other,—that Brown junior does not retain one of the principles in which he has been so carefully brought up, although he has “Daily Portions” on his table to remind him of them, and that Brown senior has long ago given up most of the notions he has been at such pains to instil into his son. Father and son, mother and daughter, sisters and brothers, are very rarely upon confidential terms with each other. Insincerity, especially in religious matters, is the order of the day. People go to Church to propitiate a mother, or to satisfy a father, to pacify their wives or to edify their servants,—certainly not to please themselves or their Maker, for they know full well that their motives will not stand his scrutinizing eye. Going to Church saves a disturbance at home, hides peoples’ real sentiments, and makes everything seem straight. At home we are insincere upon principle, and insincere we must always be so long as those who think differently from ourselves are sneered at, and avoided as fools or criminals. Some of us need not walk far to find Protestant parents who have turned their sons and daughters out of doors for becoming Papists—but what is a Papist to a Materialist? Suppose the thoughtful daughter of an Evangelical mother were quietly to inform her parents that she did not believe in a future state, that she found the Bible very unsatisfactory upon the subject, and that she felt no sort of aversion to the doctrine of annihilation, that though the notion of another and a better world was a

pleasing conceit, *she* felt grateful for and satisfied with her life here, which she was willing to give up when called upon.

Suppose she were to question the authenticity of the Bible, the identity of the Great First Cause with the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and then finish up by insinuating that the minister they "sat under" was intellectually below the average; would the expression of such sentiments, however cautiously worded, meet with such a reception in the home-circle as to encourage her fearlessly to avow her opinions in future? I trow not. Sorrow, consternation, indignation, and anger would put an effectual and abiding extinguisher upon her and her opinions, and she would learn to imitate her prudent brother Jack, who fills his book-shelves with Cumming's works and his pockets with heretical pamphlets, never tells the Governor what he really thinks about anything, but goes to church as good as gold and says Amen to all he hears, "deceiving, if possible, the very elect," and saving appearances with Jesuitical conscientiousness.

Children under seven are allowed a latitude of opinion and a freedom of expression denied them in after life. Most of us began by being practically Atheists and Materialists, content to be "without God in the world," and abundantly satisfied with temporal rewards; but after a while we get taken in hand by our elders and are taught what we must *say* we believe whether we do or not; and so we go through life Jesuits from childhood, boasting like grateful Protestants of our glorious privilege of "private judgment," but, like wily Papists, cautiously concealing the conclusions to which it leads us.

Our ears have become so much accustomed to certain statements which from time immemorial have been handed down and accepted without scrutiny, that it is not until we have become acquainted with

innumerable exceptions to the supposed rule that we begin to look doubtfully at it. Good people have a tendency to make out that what they think *ought* to be really *is*, but in a highly civilised community it is extremely difficult to determine whether a belief in God, a horror of death, and a yearning after immortality are really innate or not, because education with her creeds and catechisms is calculated to repress innate ideas.

"Let's play at funerals and I'll be the corpse," said a child of five to her little cousins a few minutes after her father's remains had been removed from the house, and when her widowed mother returned from the cemetery, she was horrified to find that the funeral obsequies were not concluded in the nursery, nor would her little girl consent to give up her amusing game until she had extorted a solemn promise from mamma to be allowed to go to a *real* funeral before long.

"Mind the coffins," cried Charlie to his papa just returned from the City, and who was rushing upstairs to prepare for dinner. Charlie's aunt had given him a very large box of bricks, and he had set up little coffins all over papa's bedroom, each containing a bit of stick wrapped in rag; he passed the evening in cutting out stiff paper lids for his coffins, and in the morning a portion of the Funeral Service was read over them by Charlie in his night-shirt, while indulgent papa said "Amen like a clerk" from the bed.

It is so frequently asserted that the fear of death is innate that people learn to look upon the assertion as a fact, and take it for granted that somebody or other must have looked into the matter and found it all true; but those who have been thrown much among children, especially among the children of the poor, are well aware that, so far from dreading death and shunning corpses, they exhibit a ghastly indifference to

the subject which must be seen in order to be believed. The children of the poor will put pins and marbles into their dead brother's mouth, and even take the corpse off the bed and set it in a chair near the fire, reprove it for not "holding up," and conduct themselves in such a way as to put all idea of innate fear to flight. We are *taught* to dread death, *taught* to pull down blinds, to speak in a whisper, walk about silently, and, if we can afford it, to put on black clothes; but suppose we were *not* taught so to behave, (and the neglected children of the poor are *not* so taught), would the conduct of the community at large be such as to put the assertion respecting the innate fear of death beyond all dispute?

Let us admit that we are insincere, and that for the sake of peace we follow suit. The little girl in that queer book called "Gates Ajar," after listening to the received account of the joys of heaven, is so little enticed thereby that she asks if she may be allowed to go to hell on a Saturday afternoon, if she had been very good all the week in heaven—a thoroughly unconventional, irreligious, but sincere little girl! a wicked, ungrateful little girl, who had had so much pains taken with her and yet is not allured by the prospect of perpetual worship hereafter! How can we be sincere as long as creeds, catechisms, and ceremonies are considered the tests of religion, piety, and morality, and what is "private judgment" worth if the expression of it alienates our nearest relatives and scares away our best friends? "Private judgment" sounds grand and glorious, but let any one dare to come to his own conclusions upon religious matters and he will soon see how his spiritual pastors and masters like the result, and what the Protestant's privilege of "private judgment" really amounts to when put into practice.

If but for one Sunday we would really act

honestly, how many of us would be found listening to sermons? How lamentable and ludicrous it is to make unintelligible creeds and the patient endurance of pulpit platitudes the test of probity and sterling worth! Well may our attractive writer, Greg, express his amazement that, "out of anything so simple as the life of Jesus could have grown up anything so marvellously unlike its original as the current creeds of Christendom." The most rigid advocates of Divine Service cannot point to Jesus as an upholder of public worship, for *he* prayed on mountain tops far away from observation, and emphatically gave the preference to private devotion, which is to be "openly rewarded."

Was anybody ever so entirely unconventional as the Christ is represented to have been, so indifferent to forms and ceremonies, and so callous to public opinion? If he "to whom all hearts are open" were to visit our churches in order to expel the infidels as he did the money-changers of old, how many of us would be left to receive his blessing?

Tied up in a tight knot by our mother the Church, we are years and years enthralled by creeds, dogmas, catechisms, and articles, and when at last we do get free, how great is that freedom! Most of us have been informed by devout friends that an infidel is an incarnation of moral depravity, and some of us have read appalling accounts of the last hours of unbelievers; but in after-life it may chance that we discover a decidedly sceptical tendency in many of our most honoured friends which in no way militates against the received standard of right and wrong; and it may also happen that we come across sincere believers who are distressingly attached to things of this world, and who quit it with unedifying reluctance. However, it would never do to hint at such discoveries in the presence of Mrs. Grundy, because she has decided otherwise, and must not be thwarted. But

what good end is answered by our habitual insincerity? Is it supposed to please God? Certainly Christ's *disciples* are said to have been indignant when they actually saw outsiders casting out devils in his name, but Christ was not reported to have been at all angry. Would he be angry now with a well-conducted infidel because he is sorry for poor Mrs. Lot, and thinks it would have been far better to have turned her infamous daughters to salt ere they reached that cave of unholy memory; evidently then, as now, one person might steal a horse while another might not look over the gate.

Poor Mrs. Lot's is a very hard case, and kind-hearted people wish it were not true; but it would never do to say so, for the Jews believe it, and Mrs. Grundy believes it, and we *must* believe it because it is alluded to in the New Testament, and is beyond all dispute. Could the Christ of the Gospels really be angry with those who cannot believe that his Father burns his rebellious children for ever and ever; and would he be pleased with us if we followed the divine example and baked *our* disobedient sons and daughters in red-hot ovens?

If that unfortunate collection of books in an evil hour called "The Word of God" had had the advantage of being revised by Jesus Christ, it is just possible that it would have undergone a very considerable alteration, and even now not a few of us are looking forward to the time when it may be divested of much that disfigures it and makes it so objectionable in a moral point of view, presenting us with a God so grovelling and so bloodthirsty that the wonder is not that there are infidels, but that there are believers; believers, moreover, of high principle, who, by a curious inconsistency, are not ashamed to confess that they really do believe it, and who are quite enchanted to see their daughters reading the edifying pages of the "Blessed Book." That Romanists should

believe in the infallibility of the Pope is amazing, but that the enlightened members of the Reformed Church should believe in the infallibility of a book, and of *such* a book, is far more incomprehensible.

Parents tenderly anxious to protect their children from all contaminating influences, purchase a Family Shakespeare for home use, but it does not occur to them that the Family Bible contains the very things which have been so carefully expunged from the works of the great poet. "I do wish God would write some novels" said a lively girl, whose books were selected for her by her judicious parents, "for Pa lets us read all God writes."

A clergyman's daughter, well known to the writer, when at school, took up, one Sunday afternoon, a novel, and was wrapt up in it, when all at once she was reminded that it was Sunday and that secular books were not allowed. She contended that her father always permitted her to read any of Miss Edgeworth's novels even on Sunday, but nevertheless she was of course made to yield for the sake of example; so the pert young lady exclaimed in her haste, "then I'll go and read the 23rd of Ezekiel and much good it will do me." The following year the same young lady refused to be confirmed, and quietly informed the principal of the school (well-known to the writer) that as she did not believe the Bible was written by the inspiration of God, she objected to answer the Biblical questions drawn up for candidates for confirmation; so the rite was in her case put off till a "more convenient season." Such pupils are awkward to deal with in orthodox schools, but they are few and far between as the sincere are everywhere.

A benighted Papist in the form of a young Frenchman bought a Bible the other day at the Crystal Palace.

He had never read the Bible.

After dipping into it for an hour or two he said, "je n' ai jamais su qu' il y eût des obscénités dans la Bible! He is sure to become a Protestant in the most literal sense of the word! Should we not all protest against obscene statements wherever we find them? Does coarse language cease to shock us because we are taught that God inspired the writers? Ought we not rather to be the more shocked because God *did* inspire them. Infidels have too high an opinion of God to believe that He had anything to do with the composition of such a volume as the Bible. They hope not—but unfortunately they are not sincere—frequently they act the part of believers so well that they are never found out; and so we go on, wearing our masks, singing our hymns, and denouncing the Jesuits with exemplary zeal, while acting upon their principle that "the end justifies the means," and thinking it best to keep the peace at home—not a bit afraid of God, but in great and abiding awe of Mrs. Grundy.

