

Sedgwick, Catharine Maria [by the author of "The Linwoods," "Poor Rich Man," "Love Token," "Live & Let Live," &c.], "Skepticism" in *Stories for Young Persons*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1849, pp. 91-94.

SKEPTICISM.

"Mother," said little Frank D____, with an unusually anxious expression on his smooth round face, "I wish you would tell me what is the meaning of *skeptical*. I heard father say last evening, he wished Uncle Henry was not so skeptical; he thought it was a great misfortune. I know skeptic means one who does not believe in the Christian religion; but I know uncle does, so it can't be anything like that: so what does it mean, mother?"

"In the first place, my dear Frank, you are not quite accurate in your definition of a skeptic; you have fallen into a common error. Skepticism merely means doubt, and not actual unbelief. Persons are called skeptics who really disbelieve the Christian religion, and those are often called unbelievers who have not quite arrived at that unhappy point, but are in the distressing state of doubt—skepticism."

"Oh, then, I guess I know what father meant, because Uncle Henry never believes anything. Yesterday, when I told him I had been up every morning this winter before seven, he said, 'Are you sure of that, my boy?' 'Yes, sir,' said I, 'for I always look at the clock the moment I am dressed.' Then he turned right round to father, and asked him how many times he supposed I had been up this winter before eight o'clock; and father told

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him he might rely on my statement, for I was an accurate boy. And then, when Susan came in, he turned right round to her, and asked her if I was an early riser! And so he always does; he asks half a dozen people, and finally don't believe any more than when he began. I think father was quite right; it is a misfortune to be so skeptical."

"It is so, Frank; and I believe it is better to be sometimes deluded, sometimes deceived, and often disappointed, than to be always doubting. Faith in God is the first and greatest blessing and support in life; next to this is faith in man. By this I mean, my dear boy, faith in man's capacity to do and to suffer; reliance on the possible attainments of our fellow-creatures; trust in their truth, goodness, and affection. But, my dear Frank, I'm going on a little ahead of your understanding and years; so I will come back, and tell you there is a kind of skepticism to which young people and children are very much addicted."

"Pray, mother, what is that?" "Do you remember that last fall, when your cousin Anne was staying with us, your father and I tried to convince her that her low spirits, and constant headaches, and cold feet and hands, and constant shivering, were owing to her neglect of exercise?"

"Oh yes, I remember how you used to talk to her, and how she used to sit there in the rocking-chair in the corner with a shawl on, and her feet up on the stove, and never stir out with the rest of the girls."

"No; she said she did not *believe* in exercise; so she went on all winter till she got a severe ill--

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ness, and that cured her of her skepticism; now she *believes*, and takes regular exercise, and is perfectly well."

"Well, she got pretty well punished for her skepticism, mother."

"Yes, Frank; and you may rest assured that all such skepticism will be punished sooner or later."

"Do you remember, when John was at home from college how he used to lie on the divan all day and read? He was told over and over again that he was injuring his eyes. He was *skeptical*, and went on reading in the same way. Now he is obliged to give up study because his eyes are weak."

"Oh, mother, how could he do so?"

"How could he, Frank? I think I know a little boy whom his mother has found nailed down to his Arabian Nights till the daylight was quite gone; and when he was pretty sharply reprov'd, he would answer, '*I don't believe* it hurts my eyes at all.'"

"Oh, mother, I'll not do so again; I'll not be *skeptical*."

"How often have your father and I told Lawton West, that, unless he pays more regard to accuracy and truth, we can place no confidence in him? He says that of all things on earth he desires our confidence, and yet he is just as careless of the truth as ever. Is not Lawton *skeptical*?"

"I don't see that, mother; Lawton keeps on lying for ever; but I don't see how it is because he is skeptical."

"If, Frank, he believed what we say—if he actually realized as we do when we heartily believe

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that we could never place confidence in him, he would make an effort to reform. How do you think it is with Sarah? I tell her over and over again that she makes me most uncomfortable by her disorderly habits. She says, 'Oh, aunt, I would not make you uncomfortable for the world;' and the next hour her shawl is on the floor, and her bonnet and gloves nowhere to be found. I tell Eliza, that if she eats candies and sweetmeats she will injure her teeth. She says directly she don't believe they hurt the teeth. Miss Smith complained to me the other day that she had a constant headache. I begged her to leave off drinking coffee. 'Oh, she did not *believe*,' she said, 'that coffee hurt her.' Mrs. Allen told me her little girl was getting very pale and thin. I advised her not to keep her so many hours in school. 'Oh,' she replied, 'I don't believe Mary will ever hurt herself with study.'"

"Seems to me, mother, everybody that you know is *skeptical*."

"The truth is, my dear boy, persons are not disposed to believe when their belief must be followed by a change of conduct—by the conquest of an obstinate fault, a bad habit, or a strong appetite. Those are best and happiest who are most ready to believe in those who have more wisdom and experience than themselves, and who will act in conformity to their belief. First *faith*, and then works, Frank."