

***HELEN
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A THOUGHTLESS YES

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A Thoughtless Yes

EAN 8596547400585

DigiCat, 2022

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PREFACE TO THE EIGHTH EDITION.

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In issuing a new edition of this book, it has been thought wise to state that an unauthorized edition is now on the market, and it is desirable that the public shall know that all copies of this book not bearing the imprint of the Commonwealth Company are sold against the will and in violation of the rights of the author.

Since some persons have been puzzled to make the connection between the title of the book and the stories themselves, and to apply Colonel Ingersoll's exquisite autograph sentiment more clearly, a part of "An Open Letter," which was written in reply to an editorial review of the book when it first appeared, is here reprinted, in the hope that it may remove the difficulty for all.

AN OPEN LETTER.

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I have, this morning, read your review of "A Thoughtless Yes." I wish to thank you for the pleasant things said and also to make the connection—which I am surprised to see did not present itself to your mind—between the title and the burden of the stories or sketches.

It is not so easy as you may suppose to get a title which shall be exactly and fully descriptive of a collection of tales

or sketches, each one of which was written to suggest thoughts and questions on some particular topic or topics to which people usually pay the tribute of a thoughtless yes. With one—possibly two—exceptions each sketch means to suggest to the reader that there may be a very large question mark put after many of the social, religious, economic, medical, journalistic, or legal facts of the present civilization.

You say that "in 'The Lady of the Club' she [meaning me] does not show how poverty results from a thoughtless yes. Perhaps she does not see that it does." I had in my mind exactly that point when I wrote the story and when I decided upon the title for the book. No, I do not attempt in such sketches to show *how*, but to show *that*, such and such conditions exist and that it is wrong. I want to suggest a question of the justice and the right of several things; but I want to leave each person free to think out, not my conclusion or remedy, but a conclusion and a remedy, and at all events to make him refuse, henceforth, the thoughtless yes of timid acquiescence to things as they are simply because they are. In the "Lady of the Club" I meant to attack the impudent authority that makes such a condition of poverty possible, by calling sympathetic attention to its workings. There are one or two other ideas sustained by authority, to which, to the readers of that tale, I wished to make a thoughtless yes henceforth impossible. At least I hoped to arouse a question. One is taxation of church property. I wished to point out that by shirking their honest debts churches heap still farther poverty and burden upon the poor. I hoped, too, to suggest that the idea of

"charity," to which most people give a warmly thoughtless yes, must be an indignity or impossibility where, even they would say, it was most needed. I wanted to call attention to the fact that a physician and a man of tender heart and lofty soul were compelled to make themselves criminals, before the law, to even be kind to the dead. That conditions are so savage under the present system that such a case is absolutely hopeless while the victims live and outrageous after they are dead. To all of these dictates of impudent authority, to which most story readers pay the tribute of a thoughtless yes, I wanted to call attention in such a way that henceforth a question must arise in their minds. I hoped to show, too, that even so lofty a character as Roland Barker was tied hand and foot—until it made him almost a madman—by a system of economics and religion and law which so interlace as to sustain each other and combine to not only crush the poor but to prevent the rich from helping along even where they desire to do so.

These were the main points upon which that particular tale was intended to arouse a mental attitude of thoughtful protest. There are other, minor ones, which I need not trouble you to recall. If you will notice, nearly all of the tales end (or stop without an end) with an open question for the reader to settle—to settle his way, not mine. Indeed, I am not yet convinced that my own ideas of the changes needed and the way to bring them about are infallible. I am still open to conviction. I have tried to grasp the Socialist, Communist, Anarchist, Single-tax, Free-land, and other ideas and to comprehend just what each could be fairly expected to accomplish if established—to see the *pros* and *cons* of

these and other schemes for social improvement. These, and the varying cults ranged between, each seems to me to have certain strong points and certain weak ones. Each seems to me to overlook some essential feature; and yet I have no system to offer that I think would be better or would work better than some of these. Indeed, I do most earnestly believe that *the* inspired way is yet to be struck out, and I do not believe that I am the one to do it. Meanwhile I can do some things. I can suggest questions, and, sometimes, answers. But I am not a god, and I do not want all people to answer my way. I do want to help prevent, now and henceforth, the tribute of a thoughtless yes from being given to a good many established wrongs.

Since such able thinkers as you are have—in the main—already refused such tribute, I am perfectly satisfied to let each of these answer the questions I have suggested or may suggest in my fiction in the way that seems most hopeful to him.

Meantime, the vast majority of story readers have not yet had their emotions touched by the dramatic presentation of "the other side." Fiction has—in the main—worked to make them accept without question all things as authority has presented them. Who knows but that a lofty discontent may be stirred in some soul who can solve the awful problems and at the same time reconcile the various cults of warring philosophers so that they may combine for humanity and cease to divide for revenue—or personal pique? I do not believe that the province of a story is to assume to give the solution of philosophical questions that have puzzled and proved too much for the best and ablest

brains. I have no doubt that fiction may stir and arouse to thought many who cannot understand and will not heed essays or argument or preaching, while it may also present the same thoughts in a new light to those who do. Personally I do not believe in tacking on to fiction a "moral" or an "in conclusion" which shall switch all such aroused thoughts into one channel. Clear thinking and right feeling may lead some one, who is new to such protest, to solutions that I have not reached. So let us each question "impudent authority," whether it be in its stupid blindness to heredity or to environment; and I shall be content that you solve the new order by an appeal to Anarchism *via* free land; or that Matilda Joslyn Gage solve it by the ballot for women and hereditary freedom from slavish instincts stamped upon a race bom of superstitious and subject mothers.

Personally I do not believe that all the free land, free money or freedom in the world, which shall leave the mothers of the race (whether in or out of marriage) a subject class or in a position to transmit to their children the vices or weaknesses of a dominated dependent, will ever succeed in populating the world with self-reliant, self-respecting, honorable and capable people.

On the other hand, I do not see how the ballot in the hands of woman will do for her all that many believe it will. That it is her right and would go far is clear; but after that, your question of economics touches her in a way that it does not and cannot touch men, and I am free to confess that as yet I have heard of no economic or social plan that would not of necessity, in my opinion, bear heaviest upon those who are mothers. So you will see that when I

suggested the desirability in "For the Prosecution" of having mothers on the bench and as jurors where a case touched points no man living does or can understand in all its phases, I do not think that would right all the wrong nor solve all the questions suggested by such a trial; but I thought it would help push the car of right and justice in the direction of light which we all hope is ahead.

You believe more in environment than in heredity; I believe in both, and that both are sadly and awfully awry, largely because too many people in too many ways pay to impudent authority the tribute of a thoughtless yes.

It is one of the saddest things in this world to see the brave and earnest men who fight so nobly for better and fairer economic conditions for "Labor," pay, much too often, the tribute of a thoughtless yes to the absolute pauper status of all womanhood. They resent with spirit the idea that men should labor for a mere subsistence and always be dependent upon and at the financial mercy of the rich. They do not appear to see that to one-half of the race even that much economic independence would be a tremendous improvement upon her present status. How would Singletax or Free-land help this? You may reply that Anarchism would solve that problem. Would it? With maternity and physical disabilities in the scale? To my mind, all the various economic schemes yet put forward lack an essential feature. They provide for a free and better manhood, but they pay the tribute of a thoughtless yes to impudent authority in the case of womanhood, in many things. And so long as motherhood is serfhood, just so long will this world be populated with a race easy to subjugate, weak to resist

oppression, criminal in its instincts of cruelty toward those in its power, and humble and subservient toward authority and domination. Character rises but little above its source. The mother molds the man. If she have the status, the instincts, and the spirit of a subordinate, she will transmit these, and the more enlightened she is the surer is this, because of her consciousness of her own degradation.

Look at the Kemmler horror. People all marvel at his "brutish nature and his desire to kill." No one says anything about the fact, which was merely mentioned at his trial, that his "father was a butcher and his mother helped in the business." Did you know that this is also true of Jesse Pomeroy; the boy who "from infancy tortured animals and killed whatever he could?"

Would all this sort of thing mean absolutely nothing to women of the same social and scientific status enjoyed by the men who assisted at the trials of these two and at the legal murder of one? In ordinary women, of course, it would not stir very deep thought But these were not ordinary men. They were far more than that, Almost all the women who have spoken or written to me of the Kemmler horror have touched that thought Have you heard a man discuss it? Is there a reason for this? Do we pay the tribute of a thoughtless yes to all that clusters about the present ideas on such subjects and about their criminal medicolegal aspects? But this letter grows too long.

With great respect and hearty good wishes,
I am sincerely,
Helen H. Gardener.

A SPLENDID JUDGE OF A WOMAN.

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"We look at the one little woman's face we lovey as we look at the face of our mother earth, and see all sorts of answers to our own yearnings."—George Eliot.

"But after all it is not fair to blame her as you do, Cuthbert. She is what she must be. It is not at all strange. Midge—"

"I am quite out of patience with you, Nora;" exclaimed Cuthbert Wagner, vehemently. "How can you excuse her? Midge, as you call her, has been no friend to you. She was deceitful and designing all along. She even tried in every way she could think of to undermine you in *my* affections!" He tossed his head contemptuously and strode to the window where he stood glaring out into the moonlight in fierce and indignant protest. His wife had so often spoken well of Margaret Mintem. She did not appear to hold the least resentment toward the school-friend of her past years, while Cuthbert could see nothing whatever that was good or deserving of praise in the character of the young lady in question. He was bitterly resentful because Margaret Mintem had spoken ill of his wife while she was only his betrothed, and Cuthbert Wagner did not forgive easily.

Nora crossed the room with her swift, graceful tread, and the sweep of her lace gown over the thick rug had not reached her husband's ear as he stood thumping on the

window pane. He started a little, therefore, when a soft hand was laid upon his arm and a softer face pressed itself close to his shoulder.

"It is very sweet of you, dear," she said in her low, gentle voice, "It is very sweet of you to feel so keenly any thrust made at me; but darling, you are unfair to Midge, poor girl! My heart used often to bleed for her. It must be terribly hard for her to fight her own nature, as she does,—as she *must*,—and lose the battle so often after all."

"Fight fiddle-sticks!" said Cuthbert, and then went on grumbling in inarticulate sounds, at which his wife laughed out merrily.

"Oh, boo, boo, boo," she said, pretending to imitate his unuttered words.

"I don't believe a word of it. *I know Margaret Mintern*. Did I not room with her for three long years? And do I not know that she is a good girl, and a very noble one, too, in spite of her little weakness of envy or jealousy?

"She can't help that. I am sure she must be terribly humiliated by it. Indeed, indeed, dear, I know that she is; but she cannot master it. It is a part of her. I do not know whether she was bom with it or not; but I do know that all of her life since she was a very little girl she has been so situated that just that particular defect in her character is the inevitable result. Don't you believe, Cuthbert, that all such things are natural productions? Why, dearie, it seems to me that you might as reasonably feel angry with me because my hair is brown as toward Midge because her envy sometimes overbears her better qualities. The real fault lies—"

"O Nora, suppose you take the stump! Lecture on 'Whatever is right,' and have done with it."

"Aha, my dear," laughed his wife, "I have caught you napping again. I do not say that it is right; but I do say that it is natural for Margaret to be just what she is. That is just the point people always overlook, it seems to me. Nature is wrong about half of the time—even inanimate nature. Just look over there! See those splendid mountains and the lovely little valley all touched with moonlight; but, oh, how the eye longs for water! A lake, a splendid river, the ocean in the distance—something that is water—*anything* that is water! But no, it is valley and mountain and mountain and valley, until the most beautiful spot in the world, when first you see it, grows hateful and tiresome and lacking in the most important feature."

Cuthbert laughed. "A lake would look well just over there by McGuire's barn, now, wouldn't it? And, come to think of it, how a few mountains would improve things over at Newport or Long Beach." He stopped to thump a bug from his wife's shoulder.

"How pretty you look in that black lace, little woman. I don't believe nature needed any improver once in her life anyhow—when she made you."

Nora smiled. A pleased, gratified little dimple made itself visible at one corner of her mouth. Her husband stooped over and kissed it lightly, just as the portiere was drawn aside and a guest announced by James, the immaculate butler.

"We've just been having a quarrel, Bailey," said Mr. Wagner, as he advanced to greet the visitor, "and now I

mean to leave it to you if—"

"Yes," drawled Mr. Bailey, "I noticed that as I came in. You were just punctuating your quarrel as James drew back the portiere. That is the reason I coughed so violently as I stepped inside. Don't be alarmed about my health. It isn't consumption. It is only assumption, I do assure you. I assumed that you assumed that you were alone—that there wasn't an interested spectator; but, great Scott! Bert, I don't blame you, so don't apologize;" and with a low bow of admiration to his friend's wife, he joined in the laugh.

"But what was the row? I'm consumed to hear it," he added, as they were seated. "I should be charmed to umpire the matter—so long as it ended that way. Now, go on; but I want to give you fair warning, old man, that I am on Mrs. Wagner's side to start with, so you fire off your biggest guns and don't attempt to roll any twisted balls."

"*Curved* balls," laughed Nora, "not twisted; and it seems to me you mixed your games just a wee bit. There isn't any game with guns and balls both, is there?"

"Oh, yes, yes indeed," replied Mr. Bailey, promptly. "The old, old game in which there is brought to bear a battery of eyes."

"Oh, don't," said Cuthbert. "I am not equal to it! But after all, I can't see that you are well out of this, Ned. Where do the balls come in?"

"What have you against eyeballs that roll in a fine frenzy when a battery of handsome eyes is trained upon a bashful fellow like me?" he asked quite gravely, and then all three laughed and Cuthbert pretended to faint.

"I shall really have to protest, myself, if you go any farther, Mr. Bailey," said Nora.

"You are getting into deep water, and if you are to be on my side in the coming contest, I want you to have a cool head and—"

"A clean heart;" put in Cuthbert.

"Mrs. Wagner never asks for impossibilities, I am sure," said Mr. Bailey, dryly.

"But she does. That is just it. She wants to make me believe that a girl who traduced her and acted like a little fiend generally, is an adorable creature—a natural production which couldn't help itself—had to behave that way. We—"

"I believe I started in by saying that I should be on your side, Mrs. Wagner," said their guest, assuming a judicial attitude and bracing himself behind an imaginary pile of accumulated evidence, "but I'm beginning to wobble already. If Bert makes another home run like that, I warn you, madam, that while I shall endeavor to be a fair and impartial judge, I shall decide against you."

Nora's eyes had a twinkle in their depths for an instant, but her face had grown grave.

"Wait. Let me tell you." she said. "Even Cuthbert does not know just how it was—what went to make my old school-friend's character precisely what it became. It was like this: When she was a very little girl her father died, and the poor little mother went back home with her four young children, and her crushed pride, to be an additional burden to the already overburdened father, who was growing old and who had small children of his own still to educate and pilot

through society. He had lost his hold on business when he went into the army; and although he came home a general, quite covered with glory, a large family cannot live on glory, you know, and fame will not buy party dresses for three daughters and a grandchild."

"I've noticed that," remarked Mr. Bailey, dryly.

"The added importance of his position and the consequent publicity made the handsome party gowns all the more necessary, however," said Nora, not heeding the interruption, "and so the family had to do a great many things that were not pleasant to make even one end meet, as poor Midge used to say. The General loved brains and his granddaughter was very bright."

Cuthbert gave a low whistle. He would not compromise. If he found one thing wrong in an acquaintance all things were wrong. It followed, therefore, in his mind, that since Margaret Min-tern had been guilty of envy, she was altogether unlikely to possess fine mental capabilities. He would not even allow that she was stylish and sang well.

His wife took no notice of his outburst, but her color deepened a little as she went on.

"She was the most clever girl mentally that I have ever known and she was a vast deal of service to me in the years we were together. She sharpened my wits and stimulated my thoughts in a thousand ways, for which I am her debtor still. But I am getting ahead of my story. As I say, the old General worshipped brains, but he also adored beauty; and, alas, his granddaughter was quite plain—"

"Ugly as a hedge-fence, and I never could see that she was so superhumanly brilliant or stylish, as you claim,

either," put in Cuthbert Wagner, as he leaned back in his deep chair with his eyes drawn to a narrow line.

"She was almost exactly the same age of her Aunt Julia, the General's youngest daughter; but Julia was a dream of beauty and of stupidity."

"Situation is now quite plain," said Mr. Bailey. "The lovely Julie got there. She always does, and—"

"Ah, but you must remember that in this case 'there' was the heart of the father of one and the grandfather of the other," said Nora, smiling.

Her husband laughed outright and faced Mr. Bailey.

"I rather think she has got you now, old man. In a case like that I'm hanged if I know how it would turn out—who would get there. The elements won't mix. It is not the usual thing.

"The beautiful stupid and the brilliant but plain are all right,—regular stage properties, so to speak,—but the grandfather! I'll wager if we tossed up for it, and you got heads and I got tails we'd both be wrong.

"There is something actually uncanny in the aged grandparent ingredient in a conundrum like that. Now if it were a young fellow,—only the average donkey,—why of course the lovely Julia would bear off the palm and leave Midge, as Nora calls her, to pine away. But if it were a level-headed, middle-aged chap like me, brains would take precedence." He waved his hand lightly toward his wife, who parted her lips over a set of little white teeth and a radiant smile burst forth.

"You are a bold hypocrite, Bert," said Mr. Bailey. "You did not have to make any such choice, and you are not entitled

to the least credit in the premises. You got both."

"This is really quite overwhelming," laughed Nora; "but —"

"Why on earth did you call her attention to it, Ned," exclaimed Mr. Wagner, with great pretence of annoyance. "She would have swallowed it whole. I wonder why it is a woman so loves to be told that you married her for her intellect, when in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of eight hundred and forty you did nothing of the kind, and she knows it perfectly well. You married her because you loved her, brains or no brains, beauty or no beauty, and that's an end of it. Isn't that so, Ned?"

"Well, I'm not prepared to say, yet. I am umpire. I have not made up my mind which I shall marry—the lovely Julia, or the brilliant niece; but I think I shall in the long run."

"God help you if you do!" said Cuthbert, dramatically. "I don't know Julia, the beautiful; but I'd hate to see you married to a cat with uncut claws, Ned, much as I think you need dressing down from time to time."

"Mrs. Wagner," said Mr. Bailey, turning to her, gravely, "I'm not paying the least attention to him, and I am eager to hear how the grandfather got out of it."

"The *grandfather!*" exclaimed Nora, "why I had no idea of telling his story. It was the two girls I was interested in—or at least, in one of them; but that is just like a man. He—"

She allowed her feather fan to fall in her lap and looked up helplessly. "But come to think of the other side, his story *would* be worth telling, wouldn't it? It must have been a rather trying situation for him, too."