

**THE PRAISE OF
HYPOCRISY: AN
ESSAY IN CASUISTRY**

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The Praise of Hypocrisy: An Essay in Casuistry by G. T. Knight

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G. T. KNIGHT

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THE
PRAISE OF HYPOCRISY

AN ESSAY IN CASUISTRY

George Thomson
BY

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PREFACE

BY PROFESSOR D. L. MAULEBY

A satirist is a reformer by indirection. He has vision of the perfect life, and black against it the ever-present contrast of human imperfection. But he does not speak out his thought in unqualified prose. To avoid martyrdom in a crucifying age, or to sting a dull conscience when other means have failed to arouse it, or merely to gratify a sense of humor, he half conceals his purpose under the guise of a disinterested or amused observer. Sometimes he says the opposite of what he means, and then he is in danger of being misunderstood.

The history of satire furnishes sufficient illustration of the serious purpose behind the comic mask. Rabelais, having once barely escaped life imprisonment on bread and water in a darkened cell, thereafter dodged his monkish critics by mingling caricatures of the Pope and current education with calls to drink and be merry. Fischart, a stanch Protestant in the days of the Reformation, imitated Rabelais and like him directed his satire against Roman Catholic vices. Sir Thomas More, despite the disguise of his Utopia, was at last executed for his opinions. In less bloodthirsty days,

Butler made the Cavaliers laugh at the Puritans in *Hudibras*, and Dryden mirrored his political and religious shiftings in unsurpassed satire. Thackeray still makes us feel as he felt the shame of so-called good society, and Lowell's fun, in the *Biglow Papers* and the *Fable for Critics*, but emphasizes the earnestness of that spirit of reform which was his birthright.

Along the crowded path of satire, there is one work the title of which might suggest that Dr. Knight had used it as a model, *The Praise of Folly*, by the great Erasmus. But one needs only to read both authors to see how widely different is their temper. The introduction of Sir Thomas Chaloner, who published an English translation of *Encomium Morie* in 1549, will show what Erasmus tried to do. "And seeing the vices of our daies are such as can not enough be spoken agaynste, what know we, if Erasmus in this booke thought good betweene game and earnest to rebuke the same: and chiefly to perswade (if it might be) a certain contentacion [contentment] to every man, to holde him agreeede with such lotte and stat of livinge, as ariseth to him." The older book is, then, mainly an essay on compensation: Be content with what you have, for the lot of every man, wise or foolish, is of mingled good and evil. Its purpose is in part, no doubt, to portray some of the sins of the

time, but the author is occupied principally in developing, in lighter vein, an ingenious paradox.

Now, there can be no question as to the essential seriousness of the book before us. Professor Knight has been teaching in Tufts Divinity School* for thirty years, during the greater part of which time he has been a profound student of Christian theology. At present he has nearly ready for the press a monumental work in several volumes, giving the ripe results of modern thought and scholarship applied to the old questions concerning God and man. Personally, Dr. Knight is a man of sincerity, devotion, and solidity of judgment. He is modest withal, and possessed of a lurking sense of humor. He is keen to see the difference between profession and performance. No one will read his book thoughtfully without wishing that the Church might be free from the defects that he marshals so cogently. Once again a satirist would reform the world.

* Now called the Crane Theological School.

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