

ORTHODOXY

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Orthodoxy by Nina Wilcox Putnam

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NINA WILCOX PUTNAM

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NEW YORK
MITCHELL KENNERLEY
1914

To
J. H. H.

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CHARACTERS

THE SEXTON	THE TENOR
THE ANCIENT WOMAN	THE CONTRALTO
THE MINISTER'S WIFE	THE CHORUS
THE LAND AGENT	FIRST FARMHAND
THE AGENT'S WIFE	SECOND FARMHAND
THE BUTCHER	A WORTHY CITIZEN
THE BUTCHER'S WIFE	THE RICH BACHELOR
FIRST GIRL	THE OLD MAID
SECOND GIRL	THE MINISTER
THIRD GIRL	THE GREAT GOD PAN
FIRST YOUTH	THE IDIOT
SECOND YOUTH	THE IDIOT'S MOTHER
THIRD YOUTH	THE CHOIR
THE BASSO	THE ORGANIST
THE SOPRANO	THE STRANGER

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Note

It must be thoroughly realized that the characters of this play are intended to give voice to their actual, private thought of the moment; but are intended to do so in the usual tone and manner of polite conventionality. Their gestures and voices must be those of people under perfectly normal conditions, and everything done to stimulate realization by the audience of the fact that it is the secret minds of the characters which are being portrayed. They, the characters, are simply saying what they are really thinking in the situation in which they are presented, instead of employing the empty social forms which we are accustomed to hearing people actually give voice to.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

There has always been a peculiar fascination for me in the realization that while people were saying one thing, they were almost invariably thinking another. In certain circumstances we all realize this to be true, as in formal greetings and the expression of social amenities; and we read through the convenient form with comparative ease. A great deal of the time, however, we have to dodge about among the deliberately misleading words used by those with whom we come in contact, seeking here and there to find their real meaning, and this is a confusing and tiring task: one of those vicarious expenditures of energy of which the world has altogether too many. Words are themselves pitfalls of misunderstanding. To each of us their meaning varies slightly in all but the simplest forms, and even these may readily be applied with totally different significance. As for the confusion which intonation puts upon the spoken word, differentiating

it from the same word when written, and the mistaken interpretations resulting therefrom, I need say nothing, as they are too widely acknowledged to need further comment. Bergson, the eminent French philosopher, points out that it is almost impossible really to convey anything through so clumsy a medium as language: and the experiment of asking a group of people to define the meaning of a simple word like "quite," for instance, will convince anyone of the truth of this.

Now granting that under the best of circumstances it is difficult for us to understand each other, why is it not indeed a wasteful thing to expend good energy on further disguise of our own thoughts? It is infinitely easier to be as direct as words permit, and the resulting reaction upon one's acquaintance is intensely interesting.

However far we may be from this ideal of genuinely frank intercourse between humans, if we possess the least curiosity about the actual foundations upon which other people's lives are grounded, we can never cease from seeking to discover, or at least to guess, what

is actually passing in their minds as their lips move over some empty formula—even when the formula is empty only from a familiarity which has brought it into contempt, and could and should be full of most poignant meaning, as in the case of the (omitted) sacred service in my play.

For of all places in which to look for feeling which rings high, and words holding true meaning, a church is the most likely. And yet it was my childish observation of those who sat around me in the bare white church to which my grandmother took me as a little girl, that inspired my writing of what I hold to be in no way a sacrilegious play. In those long hours when I sat in the red cushioned pew, my feet dangling over its edge, quick with restrained energy, my eyes fixed upon the bit of sky beyond the tall windows over the clergyman's head; in those long hours I knew that I was not thinking of the words I repeated so mechanically; and by a thousand tokens I knew that *the others about me were not doing so either!* In every way they betrayed themselves—there was no ecstasy upon their faces,