

The Church Guardian

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PROMPTLY?

CALENDAR FOR JANUARY.

JANUARY 1st—The Circumcision of Christ.
 " 3rd—Second Sunday after Christmas.
 " 6th—The Epiphany.
 " 10th—First Sunday after the Epiphany.
 " 17th—Second Sunday after Epiphany.
 " 24th—Third Sunday after Epiphany.
 " 25th—The Conversion of St. Paul.
 " 31st—Fourth Sunday after Epiphany.

CONVENTIONALITY.

"The greatest obstacle," says Nathaniel Hawthorne, "to being heroic is to doubt whether one may not be going to prove one's self a fool; the truest heroism is to resist the doubt, and the profoundest wisdom to know when it ought to be resisted, and when to be obeyed." This witness is true. The world may be roughly divided into three classes. First, and this is by far the largest class, those who are constantly restrained from action by the fear of making fools of themselves. Secondly, those who ignore this fear, and usually make fools of themselves in consequence. Thirdly, those who know what they are about and do what they have to do regardless of opinion—content to be accounted fools if need be, upheld by the conviction that they will eventually be justified.

What is it to make a fool of one's self? Whence originates the fear which is manifestly so potent? The two questions are not identical, though it is a common error to confuse them. To make a fool of one's self is to act as, presumably, a fool would act—to shut one's eyes to plain facts and commit one's self to some course which is demonstratively unwise. A man so acting is a fool, and his action does but demonstrate his folly; any fear which will restrain him is a wholesome fear, and wise men will not seek to lessen it. But the fear of making a fool of one's self is not usually much felt by fools; it cows the timid rather than the foolish, and checks wise actions more often than unwise ones. The timid—and their name is legion—are less afraid of being fools than of being thought fools by their fellows. Their fear, no doubt, is a foolish fear, but it has in it an element of wisdom. They count others wiser than themselves and attach more value to their opinion, or to their opinion as they recognize it, than

they dare attach to their own opinion if it seems to be opposed to that of others.

This tyranny of opinion is the main strength of that social tyranny which we call conventionality. Man is largely a gregarious animal, but a gregarious animal with a powerful imagination. He wants to act in such a manner that others will approve his actions; but he credits others with a wisdom which they, as a rule, do not possess, and pictures them as expecting from him a course of conduct which, as often as not, they have never thought of. People do, not what they ought to do, but what they think other people think they ought to do. The thought of what other people think hampers them and practically enslaves them. They shrink from attempting to pass this barrier; for them the fools' land lies beyond: and hence they degrade into mere respectable nonentities—fearing to be thought fools, they become fools.

Conventionality is not in itself a bad thing. It is the necessary outcome of that give-and-take principle which ensures the well-being of society. If we were always to act without considering others, we should soon need to be suppressed as nuisances. Social customs, even when seemingly most frivolous, are often in the long run beneficial. An ill-made road is better than no road at all, and social customs are, in the main, tracks marked out by the footsteps of our predecessors along which we can walk more easily than we could if no track were visible. At the same time it must never be forgotten that customs and usages are made for man, not man for customs and usages. Moreover, every custom must have been initiated by some one who first struck out a new track; what to us may seem an untried novelty may come to be customary in course of time. Man is more than a unit of society; he has an individuality of his own; if he lets society rule his actions, he abjures his freedom, and society itself suffers. What kind of tree would that be in which convention thwarted all attempts at branching? Each new branch, each new twig, is a deviation from previous custom, yet a tree without twigs and branches would be a barren stock—a mere bare pole. Happily for the beauty of the landscape, trees are not restrained from foliage through the branches fearing that they will make fools of themselves. It is the timid branches of the human tree—the great tree Ygdrasil, as our fathers called it—which too often are but withered stems through that fear of which their prototype knows nothing.

The true and perfect human life is exemplified for us by our Lord. He respected reasonable conventions, and even others if not manifestly unreasonable, but He refused to be fettered by convention. He acted independently when the need arose. It was in direct defiance of conventional opinion that He ate and drank with publicans and sinners,—yet He treated with all due respect even the scribes "who sat in Moses' seat," and never needlessly affronted any one by making light of customs which were generally received. "To overcome the world," in His sense of the word, is not to make war upon society, but to refuse to be enslaved by it. The secret of the victory, He says, is Faith—that trust in

God and realization of the unseen world, which will teach any one when conformity is harmless, and enable us to resist them when there is the need of opposition.

Clearly for any Christian man the ruling thought ought to be, not "Will the world think me foolish?" but "Does God wish me to do this or that?" If any action after due thought appears to be unmistakably the right action, that action we are bound to do, whether our fellows condemn it or approve it. Often enough we shall find on trial that the expected disapproval was, in the main, imaginary. But, whether it be imaginary or no, that is not the point which ought to weigh with us. "Quit you like men," says St. Paul. "Be strong." Men cannot submit to be mere conventional automata; they must think for themselves, act for themselves, act as becomes an enlightened judgment. They will remember that *One* is their Master, and that *One* God, and not society. They will resist all kinds of social tyranny in the fulfilment of that service which is perfect freedom.

BOYS AND GIRLS.

The world in general respects facts. "Facts are stubborn things," we say; and we no more think of fighting a recognized fact than of running our heads against stone walls! But outside the territory of recognized facts there are a multitude of which we often fail to take note, and we gain many needless head-aches and heart-aches through rashly or carelessly ignoring them. If facts are facts, so also are the relations which exist between them; and these facts, as we may call them, of the second order, are quite as stubborn as any others. But *relations* are such seemingly intangible existences that we are apt to credit them with an imaginary elasticity. We think that, though the related facts themselves are firm, their relations will yield to suit our purposes. When we find that they do not yield, we blame anything rather than our own shortsightedness; none the less, so doing, we condemn ourselves, and must find, at last, the facts too strong for us.

Boys and girls are tangible realities enough. We all recognize their existence and try to make the best of it. That "boys will be boys" is an accepted axiom far too indisputable to be called in question, and that girls are and will be girls is only less enforced because girls, as a rule, are more retiring. What, however, we most often fail to realize is that boys and girls will be boys and girls, that in their relations with one another their instincts will be equally irrepressible. There are many organizations for the benefit of the boys which do a very useful work, which no one for a moment would wish to undervalue. There are also organizations, not so numerous, but in their way of equal value, which cater for the necessities and amusements of the girls, and are more or less successful in attaining their object. But so far few have had the courage to work for boys and girls in common. Each sex seems to have its own friends, but the sexes as related to each other are unprovided for.

Now, above a certain social stratum, this divided interest does not much matter. When boys and girls meet freely in society, there may not be much need for making further provision