

# The History of Lying.

LECTURE BY MR. HENRY AUSTIN ADAMS.

Mr. Henry Austin Adams, M.A., of New York, who has made himself popular in Montreal, as elsewhere, on the lecture platform, paid his fourth visit to this city on Friday evening, when, to a large and highly appreciative audience, in St. Mary's Academic Hall, Murray street, he delivered his latest successful lecture, "The History of Lying."

Sir William Hingston presided, and very briefly introduced the lecturer, who said in part:—

"The History of Lying" might be inverted into another very interesting lecture, which I will deliver here later on, "The Lying of History." But to-night I am not disposed to dwell so much upon any one of those numerous and most picturesque examples which lie embodied in the pages of our standard historians. I am not going to drag out from their almost reverential seclusion those immortal lies which, having been told so often, and having the ivy of age clinging to them, now stand entrenched almost as truth in public estimation. I am not going to make my little essay in the effort of solving some one of the moot questions of history, nor am I, with my optimistic and romantic temperament, disposed to act as an iconoclast and drag from out its niche some idol that has been enshrined there. I go extremely into the other direction. I feel it is almost a sacrifice to drag down into the clear fresh light of historical research, from his niche or pedestal, some old traditional conception, to which, in our imagination, we have been doing homage for so many years. It is ruthless; it is unnecessary; it is dreadful.

"What I am going to discuss to-night is the history of lying as a fine art, to trace in outline what lying has done for this world of ours; and in order to get at the philosophical principles which are to control me in the delivery of my theme, I am going to ask you to allow me, for the first ten minutes, to endeavor to picture what this world of ours might have been had no lie been told.

"I remember reading not many years ago an article by a clever writer in one of the great American Magazines, which described the landing of a shipwrecked crew, upon some island in the South Pacific, not discoverable on our ordinary maps or atlases. After looking around them the shipwrecked mariners and passengers found that society upon that little island was based upon entirely different principles and conceptions from the society to which they had been accustomed in their European home. They met many people of cultivation and of education. There were institutions of literature, of arts, and religion. There were all the external evidences of a European and civilized society, but on a closer contact and mingling with the population, they discovered one of the fundamental principles of civilized society in Europe, viz., lying, not only was not to be found among the people, but was utterly useless, as by some atmospheric or climatic condition peculiar to the island, there was a telepathic and sympathetic recognition by one mind of everything that was passing in the other minds; so that on entering, for instance, the house of the charming lady who invited them to dinner for the first time—they had been saying all the way up to the house, 'I wish they had not asked us, it is such a nuisance to dress and to come'—they advanced with smiles to thank her for her courtesy, but in an instant they saw that she did not meet them graciously, as a hostess here would, and taking one of them aside, she said: 'I beg your pardon, but possibly you have not heard that on this island we see into each other's minds.' You can imagine how they had to reconstruct their ideas of life, knowing that if they passed down the street or sat at meat, that wherever thrown in contact with their fellow-beings they were absolutely open and clear before them. Though at first, to their perverted European minds, it produced an immense amount of awkwardness, they eventually got to like it, as it saved an immense amount of trouble. They found that not having to tell one lie, they were not compelled to put another on top of it, and another on top of that. Society fell graciously and easily into its component primitive conditions, and knowing that no amount of finesse or etiquette on the part of anyone could alter the situation, men and women walked simply in the light of day before one another.

"You see it is only awkward for a minute; it does not last long. The plunge is like the plunge into a cold

bath—only imaginary in its shock, instantaneous, and immediately after there comes the reaction and the glow, and we feel the thrill and electricity, the tonic of the plunge.

"We fence with falsehood because we build around our hearts and minds this immense fabric, and no one man can be found to depart from it without passing at once into that isolation which we call the crank. But so long as we are component parts of regulated and orthodox society, with no intention of injuring one another, but quite the opposite, with the sole intention of blessing one another and making things comfortable, I tell you I am glad to see you when I am not, and you do the same. But you know that I know that you don't mean it—(laughter)—and I know that you know that I don't mean it; so it comes to the same thing as on that island, only they had it there without the lie, and here we have simplicity and truthfulness, plus lying. (Renewed laughter.)

"The first lie, I believe, that ever was pronounced was not a good flat-footed, honest lie, but an evasion. 'Where is your brother?' said Almighty God to Cain, and Cain did not say to Him, 'He is alive and well'; nor did he tell the truth and say, 'He is lying dead there, where I killed him.' He evaded; he answered God as skillfully as could a lawyer. When God said, 'Where is your brother?' he answered, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' And from that start it seems there has gone on through the leaven of humanity a monstrous and persistent distortion and misstatement in everything; and most men live through life with only small and broken sections of the truth. I know that I, for instance, will go down into my grave believing more lies than I believe truths, because my books have taught me historical lies, artistic lies, musical lies, critical lies. Only in those blessed sections of my sight where the eternal truths are revealed by God to man can I be certain of absolute truth. (Applause.) In all other things I must content myself with falsehood, or with half-truths, or with evasions of the fact.

"A moment to my negative argument. Let us picture the world had it not been for this evasion that was so fruitful in its falsehoods and lies. Take it up in any one department, advancing civilization, and just imagine what society would have been had truth been absolutely regent over the souls, imaginations and consciences of men. Imagine if from the very start mankind had felt that splendor of reality, that fundamental thrill of joy and security that all of us, thank God, are privileged to feel in speaking to some men. You all know among your acquaintances some man—more than one perhaps—who you know tells the truth. There goes with some men the very hall-mark of truth—the kind that will tell you honestly how they liked the lecture. There are very few, the kind that will honestly tell you the truth, the kind that will not for any consideration of social etiquette, of courtesy, of kindness tell anything except the truth. Disagreeable, terrible creatures they are. As terrible as a child; and you know what a terrible thing a child is. In a comfortable sitting-room a lot of delicate creatures are deliciously telling each other what is not so, for the general welfare, when in toddlers direct from the hands of God, a child, and there is trouble at once. It looks up to you and says, 'What makes your nose so large?' (Laughter.) A child will look up to its mother and say, 'Ma, where did you get those spoons?'—the spoons borrowed for the occasion. (Renewed laughter.) Perhaps you have only provided six birds, and there are seven guests; you allow your mind to grasp it in a moment, and say, 'No, thank you; I never eat birds.' The child will say, 'Ma, I want another bird,' and then looking at its mother, 'What's the matter? is not there enough?' (Loud laughter.)

"If society had gone on from the start with every man telling the other man the absolute truth, and every woman had done the same, and what is more important, every man had told every woman the truth—(laughter)—imagine what society would have been. Imagine what political economy would be from first to last if pride, greed and false ambition had not been crystallized in legislation—nothing but what was absolute justice and unfaltering truth. You can imagine the simplicity of society with political economy like that.

"If you have listened to the plead-

ings and arguments in our courts and halls of legislation, and seen how easy it is to prove that black is white, and for the learned gentleman on the other side to prove then, and there that white is black, you will have seen how monstrous has been the development of falsehood, and by an inverse argument, how matchless in its simplicity would have been this great round world of ours if in jurisprudence and political economy, nothing but truth had ever been proclaimed by man to man. Imagine what society would have been if, like on that little island in the South Pacific, man had never been taught the sweet necessity of lying, the courteous and formal impulse to prevaricate, but had, by a straight cut, abandoned all diplomacy. What has been diplomacy? It has been the art of saying what you don't mean and meaning what you don't say, for purposes of state; so that just proportion as men have had authority and power and influence, the harder has it been to get from them frank, open statements. The laboring man, the common man, the uneducated man usually blurts out the truth; but if you have ever asked a great man any question, you have seen him wriggle like an eel, and has answered like an oracle, and you could take it this way or that, according as you chose, but you never felt quite sure what he meant. We therefore see that we would have had a sort of a utopian world here had that evasion first pronounced never borne fruitful heritage.

"But now turn to the sadder side and the positive, the history of lying and what it has done for man. I want to hang my argument upon these pegs. I trust I shall be traditional and having all mankind as culprit. I trust my mental charity will be broad indeed, and that I shall afford him the privilege of being defended by learned ones. I first propose to hear the arguments in favor of lying—they are plausible and great, and of universal application—'and after having heard the learned counsel for the defence, we will hear the equally learned counsel for the prosecution, and then taking the papers, possibly reserve judgment until I have left Montreal. The charge is this: that man has lied, that he has dethroned that beautiful spirit of unerring truth, and whether it be in horoscopes of faith that he writes here, or in what he has to say to me, a shivering soul upon the brink, about to launch into eternity, darkness and mystery, he stands there and lies to me about it, and he lies up from that up through the little fads and notions. In my later life he lies to me in art, he lies to me in literature about what is best to do now and here, about what other people are doing here. He lies to me by the telegraph, by the cable, and in the long editorial leader, in the pulpit, in my text-books at school, in scientific works. He lies in society, in art and in music. We know he does; we are constantly catching him at it, and constantly proving the falsehood and prevarication. And I, standing here at the end of the nineteenth century, the victim of this universal mystery and misconception, have the right to drag this culprit forth and demand a hearing.

"Now, what can be said for the culprit? 'Do you mean to say,' says the learned counsel for the defendant, 'that it is desirable, proper or possible to tell the truth, Mr. Adams?' I do 'Wait a minute, would you have art tell the truth?' I don't know much about art, perhaps if I did, I would not. 'Would you have poetry, philosophy, theology tell you the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?' I would. 'But, now, think a minute; would you have society tell the truth? Would you have people tell you the truth? Would you wish every one to tell the truth?' I would; I would like to try it. 'Very well, then,' says the learned counsel for the defendant, 'we will prove to you, first, that it is undesirable; secondly, that it is impossible; and therefore that the culprit stands acquitted of the charge, for he has committed no crime at all, but in the last analysis he has worked benedictions for mankind. 'Now, come up to me, art critics; and by art I use the broadest meaning of the word, and I include music, literature and all forms for the expression of universal life. The critic comes to me and says, 'The function of true art is not like the photographer's to give you the reflection of what is, but with the eye of insight, inspiration, to see the bold external facts which lie there, which the camera could catch' and the chemist analyse. The function of art is to catch the meaning of these external things; or as a theologian would say, it is to catch the sacramental meaning of those external and visible signs that refer to things which are not seen; so that impressionism is the true function of art. You are saying art has more to do than simply tell me facts; you are telling me that poetry has more to do than simply cataloguing the facts.

Tell me honestly, Mr. Adams, says this Sergeant Buziuz, tears creeping into his eyes, 'would you have any man paint your old, wrinkled mother's face and call it ugly? Would you call attention to her sunken gums, to her scattered locks, to her watery eye? She has those things; they are the truth. But what do you see in that face? You see the gentlest, purest soul that ever breathed. That is what the artist must give you.' He is a pretty skillful lawyer, and much is to be said for his client's side.

"In the sterner matters of history, now that he has got the jury's ear, he can afford to deal a little bit more with arguments. 'Even,' says he, 'in matters of history, honestly, Mr. Adams, would you have us go back into those glorified pages of history with the musty, date-loving accuracy of a man who can devote his time to writing a learned work in eighteen volumes, which a sane man would not be tempted to read, but which can stand the broad daylight of investigation? Would you have Macaulay nailed down to accurate detail; or would you not give the flamboyant rhetoric of his imagination the right to bloom into those figures of rhetoric? Is it not better to keep telling the boys in school that George Washington could not tell a lie, that he was perfect; so that we can build up in their minds the ambitions that rise up towards that myth? So, to go further back, would you have the middle ages and grand old days of chivalry and romance, which now are seen only in the mellowed and beautiful perspective of the corridors of time, and where, for our benefit, Scott, Mallory, and Tennyson have drawn aside the veil that intervenes—would you have them tell the truth? Shall we whip them, like a pedagogue or pedantic school marm and make them stick to facts and measurements like a scientist? Come, own up now; let us go on lying for each other's sake. Is it not better we should have the vast majority of men complacently ignorant, or honestly believing in things you cannot know, and which science has discovered to be nine parts wrong and one part true. Say, as a social being, as a religious man, as a citizen, would you have us unmask all that is given to us in the shape of tradition?

"When we come at last to the lightest and most superficial side of life, we claim for our culprit that he is no culprit; we claim he has a right, for the peace of the world, the peace of families and the welfare of society, not to tell the truth. A doctor will tell you, 'society, you must not tell the patient the truth, because it is good for the patient to believe the lie. (Laughter and applause.) The mother will tell you, 'Don't tell the children the truth. Lots of times it is better not to tell them; prevaricate, evade, tell them something else.' Would you go down into that lovely, imaginative life of man that begins in the nursery with Santa Claus and Mother Goose, and all that beautiful let-us-pretend-who? Would you rob men and women who are still children at heart; and remember, Mr. Adams, that the good book tells us, 'Except ye become as little children, ye cannot see the children of heaven?' Little children base half their joy on, and pass two-thirds their life in, pretending. 'Would you go to a child and say,' remarks the counsel, 'that spool, that string, that jingle thing are not jewels and cannot make a crown?' Would you say, 'that is not a rocking chair; you are not a school teacher, but a silly little girl?' Do you want to bring business to the divorce court? Do you want men and women, after the honeymoon, to tell what they think about each other? Do you want men to tell their wives what they think; or don't you want them to be chivalrous gentlemen and praise the cooking, and endure like chivalric heroes? You could not stand it an hour, Mr. Adams, if we told each other the truth.

"This is the case for the defendant. And now, the learned counsel for the prosecution gets down, as all disagreeable people do, especially in religious matters, to first principles, and collars the argument of the learned counsel for the defence in a moment by asking a question, 'Did God say I am the truth?' Yes, 'Who is the father of all lies?' The devil. Does God need that the theologians lie so as to keep them on His throne? Does truth, standing upon so shaky a pedestal, need that we barricade and bolster her lest she topple down? (Can you say anything that is not absolute truth without stabbing into the heart of Him who is the truth and paying court, however indirectly and unconsciously, to the Father of all Lies? I think no honest man can hesitate a moment to answer these questions frankly, and say, 'We cannot.' And I think the court would instruct the jury to bring in a verdict of guilty. But in order to meet the elaborate and very astute arguments of the learned counsel, let us

meet, seriatim, some of his salient points.

There are to-day in the literary field two great principles, realism and idealism; there are in art—I mean, for the time being, pictorial art—also those two great principles struggling the one against the other, and in all political economies, all social questions these two great giant principles are struggling one against the other; one, realism, choking and sticking to naked, cruel, bitter and syllogistic truth, at whatever cost, and the other playing upon the fancies, sentiments and emotions, a numbing jargon of mystical interpretations that lie back of the facts.

"But while it is true no fact can include all that lies back of it, we should insist that those who stand as the interpreters in art, poetry, song theology, and whatever phase of life you like, shall stand commissioned and have embedded in their heart of hearts everlasting loyalty to truth. Art has failed us in that sense innumerable times; she has prostituted it several times.

"The nineteenth century boast to-night is like that of the old Phrisee; it can look around and say to itself or to its God, 'I thank Thee, God, that I am not like all those other centuries. They crowded and imagined they knew a great deal. For three, four, five long centuries they went on teaching in all their schools that this round world was flat. They taught their unsuspecting victims in schools, that the sun went round the earth and that the earth stood still. I thank Thee, because I have abandoned everything except truth.' But has it not been shown that this century has been quite as prolific as the others in launching out cocksureties to-day, only to take them back to-morrow. Book after book is published, so that I am told hardly have the pupils in school mastered one algebra, than the master comes along and says, 'There is another algebra out, and it knocks the last one to smithereens.' It is the same with geography, geology, and history. This century has been more fruitful than any other in foisting upon the world its hypotheses, its guesswork. But just as the scientific spirit has created the thirst for fact, we can hope that with the advancing years in this great intellectual and artistic aspect of society, man will come and plead guilty before the bar of enlightened conscience. I think we can already see a spirit of humility taking the place of cocksureness, which prevailed twenty years ago in art, poetry, literature and science, and I can see a growing desire on the part of men to get at the facts.

Simultaneously, with the throwing open of the Rolls—the richest British archives—to the students of all faiths there came innumerable scholars and they are completely reconstructing, in the English mind, English history; and at the same time our Holy Father Leo XIII. threw open the archives of the Vatican, and said to all scholars of all faiths, 'Come, gentlemen, burrow in these musty archives and bring up to the daylight facts, and

## THE VENERABLE MARGARET BOURGEOIS READING CIRCLE

Of Gloucester Street Convent, Ottawa.

"The Margaret Bourgeois Reading Circle" of the Gloucester Street Convent was organized last month, on the anniversary of the death of the Venerable Foundress of La Congregation de Notre Dame, of Montreal. The purpose of the Circle is mutual improvement and the study of history, literature and music from a Catholic standpoint; especial attention being given to noted personages and events in Canadian life.

The Circle numbers twenty-eight members from among the more advanced young lady-pupils, and the following were elected officers:— President, Miss Lea LaRue; Vice-President, Miss Stella Egan; French Secretary, Miss A. Marie Major; English Secretary, Miss Teresa McMillan; Counsellors: Misses Stella Street, Kate McNarthy, Marnie Lynch, Dorothy Robillard and Clara Houde.

Meetings are held monthly, and are presided over by the Rev. Mother Superior Rev. Mother Ass't Superior and staff of teachers being present.

At the first meeting the life and labors of the Venerable Margaret Bourgeois were the leading features, and several recitations and readings dealing with her most interesting career were given.

The third, and last meeting, held in the Academic Hall of the Convent, was a very elaborate and remarkably well carried out affair in every particular. The programme was:— Hymn to Our Lady of Good Counsel, soloist, Miss A. Paquette; roll-call, to which each young lady responded by a practical quotation from the writings of the historical characters whose lives and works had been selected for the evening's readings: A paper in English, on the Calots, written and read in excellent style by Miss Josie Irvine; A selection from Carmen, by Miss Rosie Wills; A paper in French on the Venerable Mother of the Incarnation, by

facts only. It seems to me that out of this, truth will have the greatest day it has ever had in all God's world.

"I wish I could take quite as optimistic a view with regard to society. Personally, I would be content to try it. In fact, I tried it in a little way myself once, and it got me into trouble. But while I made a lot of enemies by telling them I was not what they supposed me, but was in heart and soul directly opposite. I made the friendship of the best friend I ever had—myself. (Laughter.) I think it would be a good thing if we could form a little society. I am sorry that Lady Aberdeen has left this country, because I am sure she would have started it for us—a little society of those who in social matters would make a little vow to themselves, that they would always and under all provocation, no matter what the extenuating circumstances or what the possible gain may be, solemnly, eternally and forever, tell the truth. We should be a marked body for a little while, but we should be socially successful from the start. I have met people who never cease to be children, who blurt the truth right out, and so far from not having friends, they are the only ones who have true friends, and they are the only ones you can count on as your friends. They are the ones you turn to when in doubt, and they don't say to themselves, 'I wonder what she wants me to say. They say that they think, and not what they think you think you want them to think. You turn to them when in doubt, in grief; in other words, when in need of anything, and a friend in need is a friend indeed.' The honest ones force their way; so that I should be willing that society should resolve its intention to a truth-telling society. I have found that truth has a wonderful charm; and another thing I am finding out as I get older, is how quickly people find you out when you are not telling the truth. The most delightful and accomplished social leader may for five years draw round her, like a magnet, the eyes and attentions of society with the delicate and delightful and coy way in which she says the right word, always pouring oil upon the troubled waters. In five years they have seen through her and don't believe a word she says, and then a fell nemesis comes over her. Just when no one believes a word she says, she has just got into the way of believing herself. At first she did not herself believe the pleasant things she said; but you know that if you tell a lie often enough, you believe it yourself. (Loud laughter.)

"It would be a magnificent thing if we yielded the truth absolute loyalty. We should nerve ourselves to go down to the fundamentals and almost reaches of social etiquette, and there carry the little lamp of truth, for in all seriousness, I think the days are approaching when truth will need crusaders as desperately as ever she has done, and when the perils of the ways will come for us to decide between truth, absolute and complete, and error masked in innumerable forms and palming herself off for truth." (Long continued applause.)

Sir William Hingston expressed the warm thanks of the audience to Mr. Adams for his lecture, and that gentleman duly bowed his acknowledgments of the compliment.

Miss F. Champagne: Vocal selection, "I'll Lead Thee Onward." "The Venerable Mother Superior" in a very creditable manner by Miss S. Street; harp selection by Miss S. Egan; paper in French on Jacques Cartier, by Miss R. Major; an excellent paper in English on the life and voyages of Samuel de Champlain, by Miss Kate McNarthy; recitation, "Donna Anna" in which the brave old chief was done ample justice to, and which was rapturously enjoyed, by Miss Wills; a chorus, "Good Night," brought the entertainment so far as the intellectual part of it was concerned, to a close. The audience was a highly appreciative one, and the members of the Circle received hearty congratulations and good wishes for their success in studying and bringing out of the gloom of history the various incidents in the lives of the noble men and women who labored so much in Canada's early days for the country and for religion.

But congratulations and good wishes are all very well in their way, but the devoted Mother Superior has something more substantial in store for the young lady entertainers and their more youthful companions. In their more youthful companions, in mentioning this part of the evening's proceedings the writer feels that there is a certain wish in trenching on the hospitality of the good lady by making it known that a bonny oyster supper was served in the refectory of which all partook with a gusto, none the less that it was wholly unexpected; the secret had been well kept till the proper moment. The young people gave vent to their feelings in an impromptu chorus: "There are Friends that we'll never Forget!"

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