

man retired, followed by his underling. Trouboff and the princess were left alone. She put a warning finger to her lips; then, drawing the other note from her bodice she held it in the flame of one of the candles until it was consumed.

"Now," she said, with a little smile, "there remains only your letter!"

He could not trust himself to speak. From his coat he took the oleander flower and handed it to her. She pinned it above her heart.

THE ART OF COURTESY

BY HARRY THURSTON PECK

IS IT TRUE THAT MANNERS HAVE DECAYED AND FINE BREEDING
HAS DISAPPEARED SINCE THE PASSING OF THE DAYS OF CHIVALRY?

COURTESY—true courtesy in its perfection—is something which every human being recognizes and admires, but which only a comparatively few attain. For courtesy is in reality an art. Like every other art it requires natural aptitude—the inner gift—and it requires also cultivation; while each without the other is imperfect.

The inner gift lies in a correct feeling for what is due to others and to one's self as well. It is a blending of kindness, deference, and self-respect. One may possess the instinctive attributes of courtesy without a mastery of the means for its expression; or one may be trained to the expression of a courtesy which is not felt. The untrained courtesy is often awkward; the unfelt courtesy is always insincere. Only when the instinctive feeling and the external grace are united does courtesy become an art.

Ours is a bold-eyed generation, seeking its own ends, and hurried overmuch; not very reverent or reticent, and cultivating in its manners, as in its literature and conversation, the sort of intimacy which does not make for decorous reserve. Many look back with a real regret to that elaborate and formal courtesy which was known and practised before an easy-fitting modern garb displaced the lace and ruffles, the powdered wig, the knee-breeches, and the small sword, and when

the minuet was danced and the two-step was unknown. But so, no doubt, did the gentry feel when the knight in armor became obsolete, when the courts of love were no longer held, and when the formal usages of chivalry were laid aside to be forgotten. Some hold that manners have grown worse with every age, that fine breeding is less often seen, and that it is only in romances and old pictures, and upon the stage, that one can now enjoy the gracious courtesy which is reminiscent of what seems a nobler past.

WHEN KNIGHTHOOD WAS IN FLOWER

A good deal might be said in support of this thesis, but it is, on the whole, too sweeping. Of course, the whole structure of ceremonial courtesy in the past centuries was infinitely more complicated than in later years. Our remote ancestors had a genius for display, for pomp, for stateliness, which modern Englishmen have well-nigh lost and which Americans have never yet acquired. But two points are to be noted here. The first is this—that the class which possessed the gifts and graces of manner was an extremely small one. Beyond its pale—beyond the immediate influence of the court—there were practically no manners whatsoever; the country gentlemen were of the boorish type of *Squire Western* or *Sir Pitt Crawley*.

A second point is the circumstance that the exquisite courtesy which we ascribe to the Elizabethan nobles, or to the cavaliers of the Restoration, was after all a thing to be put off and on, to be used for ceremonious occasions, and at times to alternate with frank brutality. Elizabeth herself may have been a fascinating figure as she moved amid the pageantry of Kenilworth or Hampton. Her subjects thus viewed her as the gracious lady of the realm, the fountain of honor, the pearl of chivalry, a mirror of dignity and charm. But in the council-room her ministers saw another side of this paragon, when she swore at them like a fishwife, and with foul words cuffed the ears of Burleigh.

No queen of our time could manifest the supreme grace and stateliness of Elizabeth in the moments of her sovereign apotheosis; yet, on the other hand, she could very well descend to vulgarity and violence. Read the comedies of the Restoration and find how purely superficial was the breeding of the time.

The time of Queen Anne—most artificial of all periods—was one when mere manner was exalted to a cult. And yet, if we turn to Swift's biting satire on "The Mode of Polite Conversation as Used in the Best Companies of England," it is plain that all the charges brought against the tone of twentieth-century life are the same charges that Swift brought against the society of his time—flippancy, rudeness, and an underlying note of indecorous suggestion.

A century ago, and the Prince Regent, as "the first gentleman of Europe," was imitating the sublimated refinements of Beau Brummel, while at the same time he was himself making drunkenness and gluttony the fashion, consorting with grooms, jockeys, and prize-fighters. It is always so. An exaggeration of refinement leads inevitably to a reaction of brutality. Therefore, in the past, the courtesy which we now so much admire was too often the courtesy of external form, the acquired courtesy, the courtesy that belongs to artifice and not to art.

FAMOUS TALES OF CHIVALRY

A great impression is made upon modern minds by those spectacular and memorable instances of chivalric courtesy

which have become historic. They seem typical of an exalted standard, more nobly generous than that of life to-day. One reads of the Admirable Crichton, for example, attacked at night by three masked swordsmen. Crichton, by his own superb sword-play, slays two of his assailants and disarms the third, to find that it is the son of the Duke of Mantua, who has been Crichton's patron. Thereupon Crichton drops upon one knee and presents his sword to the young prince. There is the story of Sir Philip Sidney, about to lead his troops into the battle of Zutphen. At that moment he hears that the opposing commander wears no armor, and at once he divests himself of his own. And there is the story of Fontenoy, where the British guards advance in battle line upon the royal guards of France, and the French officer calls out, removing his laced hat:

"Messieurs des gardes, tirez les premiers!"

These incidents, and many like them, lead one, perhaps, to think that the whole tone of life in other days was finer, and the breeding higher, than in the generation that we know.

And yet it is the very rarity and fancifulness of these incidents which have caused them to be remembered. They were as exceptional in their time as they would be in ours. Nor, when they are analyzed, do they justify the conclusion which has been drawn from them. Crichton, to be sure, knelt and gave his weapon to the young nobleman. This was a fine instance of chivalrous devotion, the acme of courtesy. But the duke's son took the sword, so magnanimously offered, and with it ran Crichton through the heart. The one example offsets the other as a commentary on the manners of the age. Sir Philip Sidney's putting off of his armor may have been an instance of fine courtesy, but it was beyond question a bit of very clever leadership; for his soldiers would be nerved by his display of daring to fight all the harder. And as for Fontenoy, military critics have shown that if the English fired first, it would give the French a very real tactical advantage.

And so in many ways what one may call the mechanics of courtesy were doubtless more conspicuous in other

days, and played a part in the life of a small class; but it cannot be truly said that the art of courtesy was better known, or known to half so many. Contrary to what many think, the atmosphere of aristocracy is inimical to the finest manners, because it restricts those manners to a class, and gives that class the sole enjoyment of them. But courtesy, if it be supreme, is neither the possession of a class nor to be manifested to a class. It is of the essence of democracy—not the democracy which jostles and elbows, and of which the formula is the strident assertion, "I'm as good as you!" but the true democracy, which gladly says, "You are as good as I."

THE TRUE ESSENCE OF COURTESY

The soul of courtesy lies in three things—simplicity, sincerity, and self-control. The defect of the old courtesy lay in the fact that it was not simple; that it needed, so to speak, the apparatus of externals. It was not sincere, because it was too often put aside, and was, therefore, not a part of the very nature of those who practised it. To-day, when we criticize the multitude for its bad manners, we are paying quite unconsciously a tribute to the growth of courtesy among us. For, only a century ago, who would have expected the multitude to have any manners whatsoever? But now, that which before was nearly universal jars on our nerves when we find it other than exceptional.

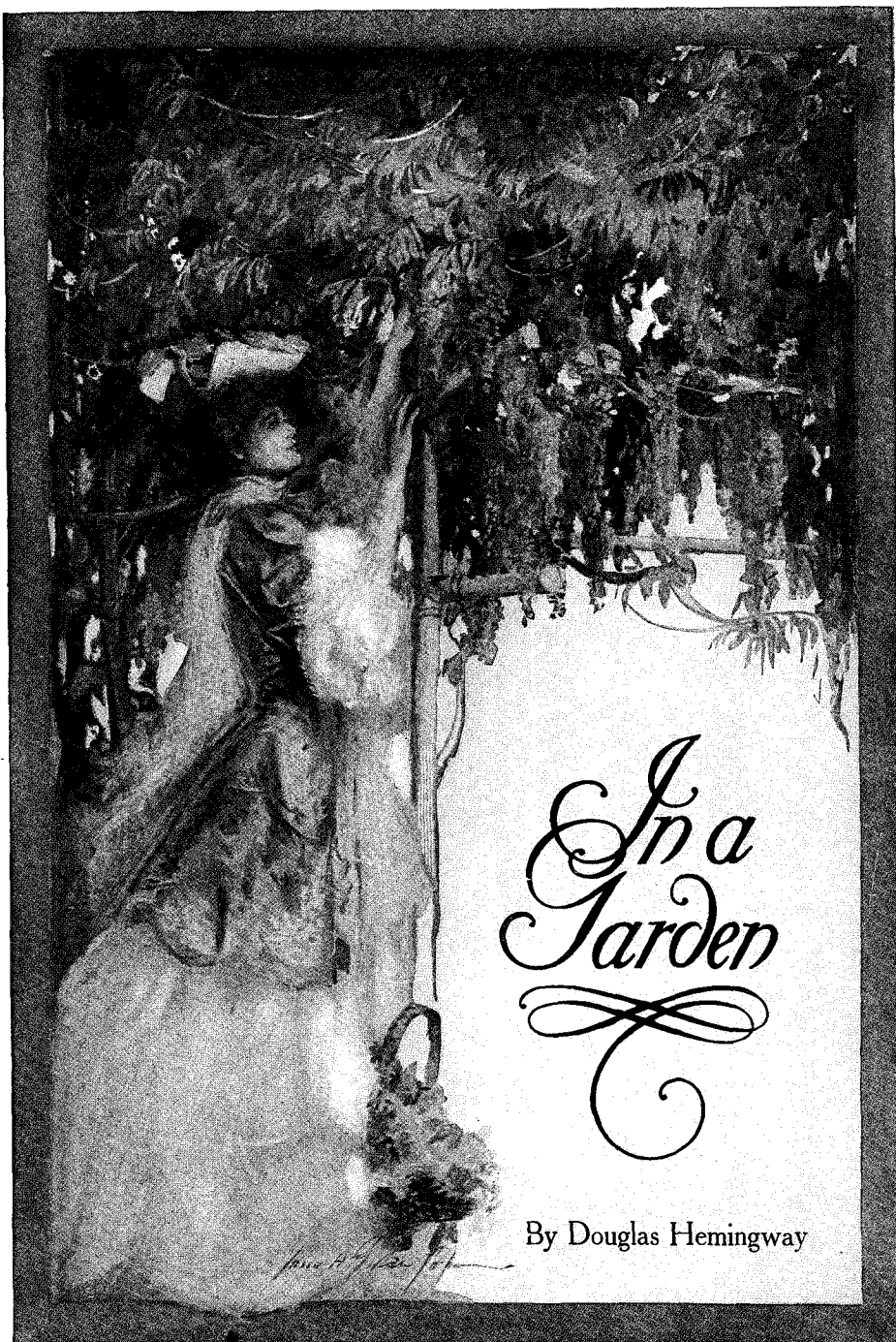
In no age can the very finest and most exquisite courtesy be anything but rare—since the union of heart and mind and sensitive feeling which makes it perfect is itself so rare. Yet the slowly broaching recognition of the rights of all humanity, the sympathy of man for man, which are the fruits of democratic teaching, diffuse the spirit which fosters courtesy and makes men reckon it among the virtues. Without the pomp and trappings which accompanied it in days gone by, it is, if anything, more real; and there are few of us who have not given spontaneous homage to some of our own acquaintances whose breeding would do honor to a Sidney, as their gracious bearing would become a Bayard.

Courtesy, because it has in it the element of self-control, is akin to courage, and it sometimes excites the admiration

which is given to courage. When Charles II in his last hour apologized to the gentlemen about his bedside for being so unconscionably long in dying, this was not, as some regard it, a whimsical or flippant speech. It was the saying of a brave man and of a high-bred man—one who had so mastered his elemental instincts as to be able, even in the face of death, to remember what was due to others. And in literature, the more fascinating heroes are not those who by sheer force and with monstrous physical strivings subdue and conquer; but rather those who meet danger calmly and with a smile upon their lips; who are imperturbable and always self-possessed; and who, even when they cross swords with a foe, do so with polished words of easy courtesy. This is the type of *Beaucaire* and *Rudolph Rassendyll*, and it is the type that wins an intellectual admiration such as is never given to him who depends on force alone.

The courtesy that knows no flaw is, indeed, alike a weapon and a sure protection. Whoever weaves about him this magical defense is impervious, invulnerable. Meeting all men with a tranquillity that cannot be ruffled, keeping one's self above the level of bluster, impatience, and ill-nature, one's adversary is always in the wrong. Insults cannot pierce the shield of courtesy, but fly back upon those who hurl them. Unfairness, meanness, spite, malice, and brutality are all disarmed and made to seem contemptible when they are met by the quiet look, the impersonal tone, the graceful indifference, and the high-bred air of perfect courtesy, which disdains to stoop to the level of what is low. And in the end, courtesy breeds courtesy; for often, when it meets boorishness, the subtle influence prevails, until unconsciously the loud, harsh voice is lowered, the whole mental attitude is slowly changed, and at last the one who has thus felt the charm of courtesy departs with something of its spell still working in his veins.

And so not merely as one of the graces of our life is courtesy to be cherished. It is that which dowers its full possessor with a gift that makes him at once a gracious figure among his friends, and among his foes a knight without fear and without reproach.



KNOW a nook of trellised blooms,
Where from the vine-clad arbor's glooms
Wistaria hangs its purple plumes—
That is the place I love!



KNOW an hour when morning smiles
Adown the garden's flowery aisles,
When springtime joy the heart beguiles—
That is the hour I love!



KNOW a maiden tall and fair,
Who walks among the blossoms there—
Fain would I tell her, did I dare,
She is the maid I love!