

AMERICAN MANNERS

BY A LAME MAN

THE intelligent foreigner who visits these shores is wont to complain of a painful lack of the smaller amenities of life, especially in respect to the manners of those whose duty it is to give him some form of service in return for a financial equivalent. He finds that he is hustled on and off of street cars and subways, and that those who wait upon him in shops are too often supercilious and indifferent; and he wonders whether this does not result from a need on the part of the guard or shopman to proclaim himself as "just as good as anybody else," being, in short, a sort of Declaration of Independence.

The facts undoubtedly are as he finds them, and it may be that he is right, in a superficial way, in the cause which he assigns to them. But those of us who have had occasion to study the matter a little more deeply are inclined to agree with the writer of an article entitled "Manners in a Democracy" which was recently published in *The Outlook*. He concluded that "the typical American has the root of good manners in himself."

I personally have had the fortune—not wholly bad, since it has taught me this lesson—to be on crutches for a considerable time, and from this point of vantage to observe the treatment accorded to the less fortunate members of society, or at least to any one in apparent or real trouble. The result of my observations has been so cheering that I have become convinced of the truth of the fact that, no matter what appears on the surface, the American of every class has indeed kindness of heart, which is the root of good manners. No more for me is the "Step lively, please," of the subway guard or the street car conductor. In its place is "Take your time, don't hurry," as I get on or off. And other evidences of consideration which I meet are so common that I long ago fell into the habit of looking, each time that I left my house, to see what especial manifestation of kindness I should encounter. It is not too much to say that on no single day for many months have I been disappointed in meeting some evidence of thoughtful consideration from a complete stranger. Sometimes it is only the courteous fellow-traveler who moves up to give me a seat by the door, sometimes it is a kindly old gentleman who insists on seeing me across a street which I have crossed a hundred times by myself; it has even been a cabman who has offered to carry me across a street gratis. But always there is something which shows the innate kindness of the "man in the street" and sends me home with a glow about my heart.

I have collected a great store of examples of this kindness, but I shall give only one—first because it is peculiarly typical, and next because it shows how completely the spirit of chivalry survives in every-day life. I was coming down from a baseball match at the Polo Grounds in New York one summer afternoon, and about a quarter past six landed on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Fourteenth Street at the moment when the large shops in that neighborhood were pouring forth their swarms of employees, most of whom were quite clearly of alien birth. I wanted to take a street car, but as I stood by the track one after another came up only to be filled by a scrambling mob which paid no slightest attention to the man on crutches waiting to find a place, till I turned in despair back to the sidewalk to wait till the rush should pass. Suddenly there stepped up to me two young men, most evidently American to the soles of their shoes, one of them so angry that I thought I must have done something to enrage him. "Want to get on a car?" he almost snarled. "Yes," said I in my most conciliatory tone, hoping to turn aside the wrath to come. "You don't stand much chance here." "Oh," said I, "that doesn't matter; I'm in no hurry. I'll wait till the crowd has passed." "Well, if you are in a hurry I'll punch some of these people in the eye and put you on."

That was absolutely the purest spirit of chivalry. Lancelot or Galahad, when they went about redressing the wrongs of distressed maidens, did no more than that young man offered to do. Sir Thomas Malory has endowed them with a stately language, as against the East Side vernacular employed by my would-be rescuer, but the spirit which would engage him in a street fight to put an entirely strange cripple on a street car was

just as fine as that of the Knights of the Round Table, and it was displayed by a young man—he looked as though he might have been a clerk in a banker's office or something of the sort—who was as completely American as it was possible to be.

Is there not something in the heritage of freedom which we enjoy that engenders such a spirit? I remember once walking in the streets of Milan with a distinguished Italian musician who had resided many years in New York, when something occurred to ruffle that gentleman's temper. Stopping short in his tracks, he brandished his fist in the air, and in his broken English exclaimed, "I t'ank God that I am not an Italian! I t'ank God that I am an American! I never knew what it was to respect myself or to respect other people until I came to America." Does not the freedom of opportunity, which is about all that our freedom means—for nobody is at liberty to do as he likes here more than in England, for instance—combined with the social equality which we enjoy at least theoretically, serve to give a self-respect which makes the American more considerate of others? Certainly my observations would seem to indicate this.

Rudeness to a lame man is not common, but I have met with enough of it to generalize, at least in a tentative way; and the result of what I have observed, in New York City at any rate, where I live, has been that where I have met with rudeness, in the great majority of cases it has come from three classes that have never enjoyed entire freedom: American women, newly arrived Germans, and Jewish immigrants. Of course I mean by this not deliberate, intentional rudeness, but the kind which comes from disregard of the comfort and welfare of other people. Women in this country have been pampered, but have not had the responsibility that comes with equality. As to the Germans, *The Outlook*, in the spring of 1914, quoted a distinguished statesman of that nation as saying, "Thank God we have no representative government!" And the whole basis of German *Kultur* is the denial of personal rights, while the rudeness of German crowds is a matter of common knowledge to every one who has spent very much time in that country. The history of the Jew is too well known to need comment. But the Jew who has been a few generations in this country, as many of us know, usually loses those unlovely traits which too often mark the newcomer, and the same is true of the Germans who have been long established here. No one who has seen the American woman as she has married abroad can have failed to recognize that she is the most adaptable of human beings, and with the same rights which steady her husband and brother she will surely gain the thoughtfulness which she now seems to lack.

Some women themselves perceive this limitation of their sex. I happened to be, some time ago, in a large crowd of women who were moving from one room into another. I was jostled and pushed about so that I was in some danger of being knocked down, so I worked my way to the side of the passage, and, getting my back against the wall, stopped until the rush should pass by. In decided irritation I remarked, in no suppressed tone, to the person who was with me, "There is nothing under God's heaven that is so rude as a crowd of women." A lady of my acquaintance who was passing turned and came back, saying, "I heard what you said, Mr. Lame Man, and I am sorry to say that it is true."

I do not mean to imply that I have never received kindnesses from Jews, Germans, or women. Heaven forbid that I should be so misunderstood! But I do mean that, among the very considerable number of exceptions to the politeness with which I have met as a rule, a distinct and noticeable majority are to be found in the three categories that I have named.

I heard a story the other day which does not bear on American manners, but it is so good an example of the good manners that spring from kindness of heart that I may perhaps be pardoned for telling it.

In a New England city there lives a gentlewoman of very modest means, partly blind and very deaf, but with such an active mind and so vital an interest in what goes on to-day that many distinguished men are proud to number themselves among her friends. She was very deeply moved by the *Somme drive*,

and decided to write and express her sympathy to King George of England, King Albert of Belgium, the Czar, and President Poincaré. In due course of time there arrived at her dwelling a large square envelope bearing the royal arms of England and containing a letter from Lord Stamfordham, King George's private secretary. This letter acknowledged the receipt of her own, and thanked her, in his Majesty's name, for the sympathy which she had expressed. The following week there arrived a long envelope bearing the royal arms of Belgium, and conveying a message from King Albert similar to that from King Edward. It is difficult to imagine two more admirable exhibitions of good manners than these.

Perhaps I may be permitted one more anecdote because it seems to me so very characteristic. I was present at a small dinner given to a distinguished German artist who was visiting this country not long ago. There were seven other men at the table besides the guest of the evening, most of whom were pro-Ally, and two or three of whom had written much on that side of the question, and so were thoroughly up on the

arguments for both sides. During the dinner the German said, "Is it permitted to talk politics?" "Certainly," was the answer. Whereupon he launched forth upon an extended exposition of the German side of the case, the others present politely assenting to whatever he might say with a courteous "Yes?" or "Indeed?" till he had exhausted the subject, and talk drifted in other directions. Not a word had been said to contradict the gentleman or to show that what he said was neither welcome nor believed. As I rode home that evening I said to myself, "That is the best exhibition of good manners I almost ever saw." The great artist had been our guest, and nothing must be said to show him the slightest discourtesy, no matter how high feelings ran upon the subjects he was discussing.

Not long afterwards I described the scene to an American who had taken his Ph.D. degree in a German university and had married a German wife, and so was peculiarly well fitted to appreciate it at its true value. He leaned forward and laid his hand upon my arm, saying, "My dear sir, *that is American Kultur.*"

A MUTED MESSAGE

BY LOUEEN PATTEE

ALL the world loves a lover, and, having reached the years when my love affairs are chiefly those of other people, I confess I was deeply touched that day when young Lieutenant von Ullrichstein came to intrust his heart's inmost treasure to my keeping. We are so surfeited with romances of American gold burnishing up impoverished European titles that it at least has the spice of variety to know of the reverse happening, or nearly happening, now and then, though I grant it may be the exception that proves the rule.

I knew his story well. It happened some years ago, when Muriel Lee had been spending the summer with me in Munich. Muriel was the typical American girl, tall and lithe and irresistibly good to look upon; she was, however, a little nobody, in spite of her air, and really of no particular depth or intellectuality. But her dark eyes had lights in them that mirrored immeasurable depths, and her smile made you forget everything but sunshine and song. Besides, she was not even rich; her portion was nothing more than the moderate comfort that is called abundance in an insignificant Western town. Unfortunately, she was the only child of doting parents. I say unfortunately, because she resented a sense of duty that deprived her of the untrammelled freedom that most of her friends enjoyed. That summer with me in Munich was an exceptional hiatus in a European trip while her parents were taking the cure at Marienbad, a boredom which Muriel had rebelled against with all the strength of her sound young body.

We had gone up to the mountains for an outing, and, after visiting the royal castles, we had lingered on in Hohenschwangau to invite our souls. The last evening we had just finished our supper under the trees by the little gem-like lake when Karl von Ullrichstein drove up with his mother. I had not seen them for some months, and when her Excellency requested the pleasure of our company for the evening it was like an invitation to Court; it was practically a command.

That evening settled the fate of Karl von Ullrichstein, as he afterwards told me. I suspected nothing at the beginning. I had seen men captivated by Muriel before, and escape without a scar. During the next six weeks, however, his plans coincided miraculously with ours, and it finally ended by her Excellency inviting us out to their castle in the mountains, an ancestral domain that would have conquered any American girl of romantic imagination; and before Muriel had gone to join her parents at Marienbad, to start on her homeward way, he had declared himself, only to be rejected with her positive assertion that her parents would never permit it. Undaunted, he had followed her to Marienbad, and had in courtly European fashion asked the father for Muriel's hand; whereupon Muriel's mother grew hysterical and Muriel's father remained obdurate, unmoved by the fame and honor and social prestige, in addition to vast wealth, which the one son and heir of the house of Ullrichstein

inherited, besides being an exemplary young fellow on his own account. They objected on principle to international marriage, and Muriel was rescued from impending doom and taken home for safe-keeping.

Karl von Ullrichstein was persistent notwithstanding, and even spent three months in America the following year. What transpired I do not know, but he came back to Munich exultant, feeling that he had won her, and confident that in time he would overcome her parents' objections, too. However, six months later, after showing me a letter from her which was a final negative beyond doubt, he said good-by to me before starting off to the Orient for a year.

He returned to Munich on the very eve of the war, and I did not see him before he marched off to the front at the head of his regiment. During the first year of the war I had had occasional cards from him from the trenches; several times I had sent little presents to him for his men, and I had written him when his mother died unexpectedly.

And suddenly he was standing before me, back from the front on a brief furlough; his handsome young face was bronzed and aged and haggard, stamped with that grim solemnity that chokes the futile question in one's throat. Without preliminaries, he began unburdening his heart.

"You will not misunderstand me, I know, when I tell you what I am going to. In these days of inexorable finalities artificialities can be done away with. I want to send a message to Muriel by you, for I do not believe it will offend her. Will you take it when you return? Tell her, though I have tried to forget her, she has remained the one great illuminating experience in my life, and when—if—I fall—my last thought will be of her.

"And one thing more I wish to ask you, and you must tell me frankly what you advise. You know my mother left me a large inheritance that I can dispose of as I will. Would it be acceptable—do you think it would be in any way disagreeable—to Muriel, if I left it to her? I have thought it might make her freer, might perhaps enable her, to marry the man of her choice."

I confess that I was bewildered by the unheard-of question. I could only commend his faithful devotion and refuse to have anything to do with the matter.

"That is strictly confidential," he went on. "I know you will not betray me. But when you go back you will tell her what she has meant to me?"

A brief farewell, and I stood listening to his saber clanking down the steps.

A few months later I returned to America to find Muriel satisfactorily, if somewhat prosaically, married to a man of her mother's choice in her own home town. The message I did not deliver, but stored it away in the deep recesses of my memory.

And Karl von Ullrichstein and his bequest? I know nothing of either. Perhaps both have ceased to exist.