

Are we an Impolite People?

Before the question can be intelligently discussed, we must arrive at a clear understanding of the word polite. Then we, for are we not the people, can measure our selves by a correct standard, and answer according to the facts.

After a thorough search through Webster, tracing out the meaning of every synonym, and with growing respect for a word of two syllables that can mean so much, the impression left is that politeness really means the art of correct living. Its synonyms are courtesy, good-breeding, manners, deportment. We -

2

Vanity, affability, civility;
and each of these, in its turn,
is defined as politeness. Each
to be sure, has some varying
shade of meaning that differ-
entiates it from all the rest, but
its perfection is illustrated by
the word politeness.

Webster says "Politeness
denotes that ease and gracefulness
of manners which first sprung
up in cities, connected with a
desire to please others by antici-
pating their wants and wishes,
and studiously avoiding what
ever might give them pain."
This is truly the Golden Rule
~~in men but~~ elaborated.

Courtesy is a somewhat
more stately word, meaning

3

originally, the politeness of
Courts, displaying itself in the
outward address and bearing,
Milton declares, you remember,
that he will trust,

"The honest offered courtesy
Which oft is sooner found in lowly Sheds
With smoky rafters, than in tapestry walls
And Courts of princes, where it first ^{named} was,
And yet is most pretensed."

Good breeding is a matter of train-
ing in politeness, the result of dis-
cipline and habit, rather than the
spontaneous & expressive of kindly
feeling.

Good manners would seem to
be the same, but Webster quotes
Emerson as setting forth the

Meaning of these words in the
 sentence "Good Manners are
 made up of petty sacrifices,"
 and their remarks they mean
 politeness, courtesy, and all
 the rest.

Department, the word
 which Dickens has forever as-
 sociated with all that is stilt-
 ed and artificial in his picture
 of Twynedrop, is defined, as
 "manner of acting with respect
 to the courtesies and duties of
 life." While civility is character-
 ized as that sort of politeness,
 or that "state of society in which
 the relations and duties of a
 citizen are recognized and
 obeyed". Affability and ur-
 banity are still species of po-

citiness, a sweet and gracious
demeanor, as well as a radiant
good humor, being their out-
ward sign and seal -

• We are an Impolite Peo-
ple. I must confess I ap-
proached the subject in a
state of prejudice. I have
something of the feeling of
the little girl, who when
asked in Sunday School
who was the first man,
promptly replied "Geo.
Washington" - When the
teacher dissented she enforced
her statement by st-
claiming "No, at the first

in peace, first in war, and
 first in the hearts of his coun-
 trymen's. "Yes said the teacher,
 but Adam was the first
 man - "O. Contemptuously
 said the little maid "If you
 are speaking of foreigners,
perhaps he was. As soon as this
 topic was assigned I
 decided to answer the question
 in the negative, and had no
 doubt-sufficient-proofs were
 at hand to justify my posi-
 tion. But, alas! Webster ^{trump up Bible} ~~has~~
 somewhat unsettled me,
 and suggested an ideal d-
 most above the possibility

of general attainment. I do
 not however altogether
 despair of showing that we
 are at least reaching toward
 it, and that the signs of
 the times are, for the most
 part ~~favorable~~ ^{propitious}. You
 know "Holmes & Co's" The
 great thing in the world is
 not so much where we
 stand, as in what direction
 we are moving; ^{Some one, I believe it was} Matthew
 Arnold, ^{after} visiting this Country,
 and studying its Customs,
 its people and its institu-
 tions turns up his eye -

8

* pressions by saying, in effect, ^(I cannot agree in his last Campaign) that we cannot discover that we are able, as yet, to produce any class, preeminent in culture, comparable in quality, to a similar class in the old world, but that our average culture is higher than that of any other people - He did not, I believe, intend to be altogether complimentary, but can anything better be said about us? ~~To my mind~~ ^{cannot} something similar ~~might~~ be affirmed concerning our manners. As a people, we may lack some of the courtesy that pertains to courts, some of the good breeding that crystallizes the forms of social etiquette into a habit of life, some

of the urbanity supposed to be
peculiar to those who dwell
in cities, but the sort of politeness
most common among us, so
common as to be really character-
istic is a better sort than any
of these. ~~Some one says~~ ^{It is said} "No one
can be truly polite without the
practice of self-denial." Is self-
denial a characteristic of our
people? We have not that repu-
tation, but on the contrary are
declared by outsiders to be ag-
gressive, grasping, self-assert-
ive. Here, as every where else,
the few who misrepresent us
are superficially judged to be
the people. The man who talks
the loudest in a crowd ^{and} pushes
the most sturdily, determined to

to get there first regardless of
 the rights of all the rest, makes
 the most decided impression on
 all beholders, tho. the rank and
 file may have conducted them-
 selves with becoming self-re-
 straint. At a table d'hoite in
 Germany an American lad
 said to my sister, as some
 Spinach was served in the
 manner peculiar to the Country
 "Here comes some green hash." An
 Englishwoman near me at once
 in her note-book "Americans
 call Spinach green hash." We have
 certain peculiarities which are
 often misunderstood. When the
 maid who answers the door
 bell, tells you that the Wash-
 lady is waiting to see you, it

will not be wise to conclude that either one means to be impertinent, or that either wholly misunderstands the situation. Kate Gannett Wells says in an article on "Caste in American Society": "American Society is an anomaly which must puzzle all those who do not believe in it; who do not see that its varying centres are but eddies on the surface of the fixed condition that one man is the equivalent of another in capacity, and that his failure to prove it by results, is the consequence of circumstances beyond his

individual control." It is
this fixed belief that one
human being is the equal
alent of another that is at
the foundation of much
that is best in American
civilization. It is this that
has helped to make our
growth and development
the marvel of the world. It
is in essence, an irrepressi-
ble and unconquerable self-
respect that makes an Amer-
ican coach, a cadet or an
American wood chopper
equal finally to any situ-
ation, and able more pre-

frequently here than else-
 where, to attain high place
 finally and to grace it
 when attained - A woman
 who associates the word
 lady, perhaps mistakenly,
 perhaps not, with much
 that makes life worth
 living, with that which
 she hopes to be, and means
 her daughter ^{shall} be, is right
 in insisting on the title -

She says in effect to the woman
 who employs her, "All these
 outward evidences of superior-
 ity - this polish and fine
 language of no special account -

"The real thing may be mine as
 well as yours and I want you
 to acknowledge it." So, though
 you may smile at the seeming
 incongruity, respect the am-
 bition, and try to understand
 both the pathos and the promise
 it voices. Abraham Lincoln
 said - I like to quote it -
 "God must love the common
 people, He makes so many of
 them". We are a nation of
 common people, but consider
 that common things and com-
 mon people are the mighty
 forces that keep the world going
 and that no people, common
 or ~~uncommon~~, could possibly
 achieve such a history as ours

without-constant and severe discipline. The beauty of service and self-denial shines from every page of that history -

Much is also said about our ill-mannered children. Here again the rude and boisterous and untrained are taken as a type of the whole, but from an experience of many years as a teacher I can truly say these are the exception rather than the rule. I often meet the children of one of our large public schools on their way home at noon. They are quite as orderly and respectful as the same number of grown-^{people} would

Among other good things
 our public schools are doing
 is this, that in their supervision
 of the play-grounds and the
 orderly way in which the
 children are taught to enter
 and leave the school-room,
 they are giving daily lessons
 in politeness - Children learn
 so easily and they admire
 and quickly imitate a courteous
 and gentle manner - Some ex-
 perience in Mission schools
 for girls ^{also} has shown me that
 the best ^{street} ^{apart} ~~best~~ ^{way} can be led
 swiftly to an ^{agreeable} ~~little~~ manner by
 the practice of invariable courte-
 sy on the part of the teacher.
 The point I wish to make is

ican man is acknowledged
to be without an equal in
his treatment of women -

A young girl once
asked a celebrated Bishop
of the Episcopal Church,
whether it was correct to say
a-men or a-men. His re-
ply is worth remembering -
"Ah, my dear," he said, "My
advice is this - Never mind
about the a or the a, but
stick to the men" - He as
women see a martyr and cher-
ish self-denial practiced
every day in the manner of
men towards us - Madame

Sarah Grand says

"I consider your men the most perfect of gentlemen. Our Englishmen are kind and good and, of course, well bred; but the American man thinks of so many delicate little courtesies which are very grateful to a woman and which never occur to the average Englishman."

The best thing about this is that it is the average man who is the most thoroughly polite man among us - The snobs, the indifferents, what may be called the "dressing pillars" of society belong to one of two classes, those below the average, or those who have newly risen financially above it. It is asserted that nations now take rank largely according to their treatment of their women. ^{According to this standard} ~~If this be true~~ Old Glory waves above the first nation on the wind

carter. During the busy holi-
 day season I was left in
 charge of our horse and car-
 riage in front of the Los Angeles
 Theatre, while my husband
 attended to some business in
 an adjoining office. A burly
 looking man drove a heavy
 truck so close to me I feared a
 collision. I was directly in his
 way as he wanted to leave a
 box at a store ^{almost in front of me and} ~~in front of the theatre.~~
 I could not move because of the
 crowd. He looked puzzled for a
 moment and I wondered if his tem-
 per would fail, but no, when
 he saw my troubled face, coupled
 perhaps with my gray hair,
 he said with a smile, "I won't
 be afraid Madam, I'll get out

of your way in a minute" -
Then he quietly shouldered the
heavy box, & carried it around
me, coming back as quickly
as possible to drive out of
my way. A young business
woman told me the other day
that never, since she entered the
office in which she worked as
a book-keeper, had she been
allowed to lift the heavy ledgers.
Another, a college graduate,
studied law not long ago
in this city, the only woman
in a class of 15 - She spent
several hours, on certain
days every week, in the
law library. The men stud

ging there at the same time,
were in the habit of smoking,
as they read, and she feared she
would be compelled to give up
her book so offensive was it
to her - After a few days, when
it became known that she was
a fixed ~~planet~~ and not a
wandering star, she noticed
with gratitude that the smok-
ing was abandoned, and the
atmosphere clear. She could
hardly believe this was really
on her account, but became
convinced, when going to
the library on an off day,
she could hardly find her
way across the room, be-
cause of the clouds of incense

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 rising to St. Nicotine. One of
 the young men remarked
 one day "We used to smoke
 during our lectures and sit
 with our feet on the table."
 "Why do you not do so now?"
 He asked. "Because if you
 was the prompt reply. You
 could ^{hardly} not duplicate these in-
 stances any where outside of
 our own country -

How can a man be truly
 polite & apt he have a courteous
 mother? I take it that the American
 mother, as a rule, must be a woman
 capable of inspiring the admiration and
 respect of her boys. It must have been
 so in the past, at least, there is some
 danger that our boys and men may
 spoil our girls and so endanger the

the future. John Gilmer spent days in a magazine article on the "Decay of manners".

DURING our national existence we have been much commented on by visiting Europeans. The general opinion has been that we were not only virile and enterprising, but most amiable and polite. Thackeray, commonly called a cynic and a satirist, found that we were delightful, and was pleased with the men and women he met whether in Boston or New Orleans.

And again,

I have held, after comparing our own people with those who live in Europe, and I have a wide acquaintance with people both at home and abroad, that the Americans during the past two or three generations at least have been the most genuinely polite people in the world. They seemed to me to have had something of the best of each of the great European races—the straightforwardness of the English, the simplicity of the Germans, and the polish of the French. But better than all, especially in their relations towards women, the American men have seemed to me to be influenced and controlled by a respect and a protecting care which made them models of genuine chivalry.

But he sees signs of decay, especially in our large cities where he describes men in their "rush after places on the cars at hours when travel is most congested, as acting more like wild beasts

than like American gentlemen - He
infers danger to gentle manners al-
so from the entrance of women
into business, and from her com-
radship with men in our door-
sports, but pays this tribute to
the Average American,

But there is one class of people in America which I fancy is not likely ever to become infected with the baccilli of rudeness. I allude to the plain people, the common people. They are too good and too substantial at bottom ever to become very vulgar. They have never been adepts in the graceful social arts. On the contrary, they have never been acquainted with them and care nothing about them. But they are honest and kind, and they hate meanness and nastiness for the deadly sins that they are. And they know them, too, at sight. They are simple and unaffected, but they are as far as possible from being foolish. A lady of experience told me the other day that she believed the plain, every-day, common American man was the most dependable creature alive. They never fail you. There is no kindness they will not undertake, no service they will not render.

And then, in
concluding, after citing many individual
instances of bad manners which he fears
are becoming characteristic and national
he sums up as follows -

To-day, I think, we are in a most uncomfortable condition, uncomfortable and utterly unlovely. But I am sure it is merely a passing condition, a part of the process of evolution which has been going on from the beginning of time and which will go on forever.

And thus, on the whole, the verdict is favorable.

As it seems to me, the saving grace, the leaven which will in time leaven the whole lump, is the fact that American politeness as a rule is genuine - It begins at the bottom, and must of necessity rise, like cream to the top, for this generation of average men and women is bound to say social statistics, in a few generations, to exchange places with the one now in the lead.

And this fact of sincerity is what differentiates the politeness of our people, our common people if you will, from ^{that of} the same class in Europe - One of the first pleasures the American is conscious of on going abroad, is an increased sense

of social importance, due to the un-
 varying deference of all who in any
 way have power to serve him. He
 meets this on ship-board first, if he
 travel in a foreign ship, and he says,
 "How Charming! Would that our serv-
 ing people could learn ^{how} to unite good
 manners and good service in this de-
 lightful way." The pleasure lasts
 until pay-day comes, and then
 one learns unmistakably that
 every bow and every courtesy
 have a financial value and
 represent so much cash. Go to
 a Continental Hotel and leave
 without paying generous fees to
 the entire Menage, Landlord and
 all, foolishly thinking you have
 done your duty when you paid
 a separate charge for service
 on your bill - Return, and you

Discover that neglect and rudeness
have taken the place of the dif-
ference and readiness to anticipate
every wish which marked
your former visit; and learn
thus to respect the amenities of
your own Country.

In Italy the beggars on
the street have charming manners
until you refuse them alms. I
have seen a little girl, scarcely
out of babyhood, offer flowers
or matches for sale with a win-
ning grace impossible to an Amer-
ican street child, and turn into
a little fury at a refusal to buy.
What American Cab-man would
dare to pursue an innocent
tourist for Rocks, bowing and
beseeching, always politely un-

'Til he ^{was} saw the Chase ^{is} was bootless,
 and then curse and threaten
 as those in Naples do - I remem-
 ber one such who made our
 life miserable on a sunny
 spring day, when we tried
 to take a walk for simple
 pleasure - After several blocks
 of pleading he began to rage
 and finally said savagely in
 broken English "A. yes. A - A
 Americans - You want - nothing
~~You want~~ ^{but} good bye" - He
 was correct! We did want
 "good bye", and we wanted
 it & the money - Scratch a
 gente mannaired Italian
 peasant on the back, and
 lo! a barbarian of the middle

eyes comes to life. And who
can wonder. As we compare
the common people, of Spain
and Italy at least, with our
own, while we thank God
for the difference, we must
remember also the difference
in their inheritance and en-
vironment. Iron-bound caste,
based upon purely artificial
distinctions, whether in India
or Italy, always has, and al-
ways must be a curse to the
under classes. The more
favorable are the conditions
that give hope of a rise in life,
the more self-respecting those
who hope and mean to rise will
be. France and Germany and

England are coming to illustrate
this truth more and more.

In England, genuine politeness
and a fine and exquisite good
breeding have found their most
perfect expression among
those, who through many gen-
erations have made good
their claim to be called gentle-
people, but the very distance
that separates them socially
from the common people
prevents that sort of influence,
possible only to families in
recourse. And the fact that
the place they occupy is un-
attainable except by birth,
discourages that emulation

necessary to improvement.
 The English gentlemen and
 women are genuine, but
 the class is so ^{comparatively} limited in
 number, and so far away,
 that it cannot get any purchase
 for a cause to lift up those
 beneath.

To my mind the rank
 and file of the German peo-
 ple are more like our own
 than any other foreigners I have
 met. They have not the suavity
 of the Southern races but they
 are sincere. They too keep a
 sharp look out for fees, but
 if you pay a just wage for
 good service you can mitigate
 that misanthropy. They are not beg-

gave, but workers and expect
to earn what they are paid -
And the German children,
with their blue eyes and their
flaxen braids and their prim
manners, and their abnormal
industry are delightful little
creatures - They take their pleas-
ures so soberly and in such
queer places, I never could
quite understand them. An after-
noon with Mama, or a staid
and dignified Fraulein in the
Cemetery at the family burying
place to celebrate some ann-
iversary of the dear departed,
or a quiet little picnic in
a beer garden to the sound
of good music, while their

oldiers saying a Pruzal Cuckoo
 seems to fill their cup of joy
 to the brim -

X The Japanese, it is
 said, are the most polite people
 in the world, but when I read
 in what is supposed to be reliable
 history, that even the exchange of
 gifts between friends is regulat-
 ed according to a strict Commer-
 cial standard - that is if I
 am presented with a token of
 affection, I must return it, as
 needs a ceremonial call here,
 within a given time, by a more
 token of equal or greater value, or
 be reckoned quite ^{out} of the fashion.
 I conclude, if all their social
 code is formulated in the same
 way, I had rather be a polite

American than a polite Japanese.

+ However, even what

Henry James calls a "Violent Yankee" like myself, must concede there are abroad in the land some signs of a tendency towards a decadence in good manners. We are threatened with almost a total loss of our rural population.

The cities are growing in an amazing way, and the country is losing proportionately. In the rush and hurry and strain of city life for the vast majority, there seems to be no time for attention to the small amenities we call politeness, and there is danger that, too,

politeness originated in Cities, it may also finally be destroyed there as a National Characteristic - These Centres of busy life are also largely populated by the most objectionable element of foreign emigrants. We must expect that Italian manners will be grafted upon

the American tree if no pains are taken to keep the stock pure. I could, finally, speak of the telephone as a corrupter of public manners, but those of you who are on a party line can judge for yourselves whether it should not be numbered among those forces that tend to the decadence of politeness among us. But we will not quarrel. When the strong forget to respect the rights of the weak, when our men forget self-denial in his manner toward women, when boys are no longer taught deference to mothers and sisters, when

Mothers and dealers strive eagerly to become as much like men and boys as possible. When population becomes so over-crowded that there are more people than can be fed and clothed and sheltered decently, then, and not till then, shall we be in imminent danger of becoming a really impolite people.

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Calif

by Mary B. Weldie

Dastman 2