



# THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL

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## A SOCIAL SIGN OF THE TIME

**W**HEN a man is courtly and deferential to a woman nowadays we say that "he is a gentleman of the old school." We do not mean to imply by this that the men of our own generation are lacking in politeness to the other sex. But we all feel that the old-time gallantry and chivalry are gradually passing away. Mrs. Julia Ward Howe observed the changing condition of affairs when she recently wrote from a lifetime of experience: "I do not think that the manners of so-called polite society to-day are quite so polite as they were in my youth. Young women of fashion seem to me to have lost in dignity of character and in general tone and culture. Young men of fashion seem to regard the young ladies with less esteem and deference, and a general cheap-and-easy standard of manners is the result." Mrs. Howe, herself a leader in the cause of "enlarged privileges for women," concedes that the changing condition of affairs is due, in a measure, to the different social status of men and women. But she thinks that if the charmed circle of society has been seriously damaged superior external benefits have accrued. These benefits she defines as being that "women are leading nobler and better lives, filling larger places, enjoying the upper air of thought where they used to rest upon the very soil of domestic care and detail." And her deduction is that "the community gains, although one class loses."

**B**UT the vast majority of sensible people will agree with Mrs. Howe's first observation, while they dissent from her subsequent explanation or deduction. No community gains an iota in a single respect which loses the refinement and delicacy of the old social conditions, is their argument. And they are right. The fact is that women of every mind are on all sides beginning to reckon the cost of this "movement" for the extension of their "privileges." Even those who were strong adherents in the "faith" at the beginning are showing signs of an abatement of enthusiasm. It is not alone in the circles of fashion that the poisonous arrows of woman's "enlarged sphere" have entered, but in every grade and walk of our social life. And, in each instance, absolute damage has been done. A distinct and gradual decadence of politeness in the whole social body has been noticeable of late by people who watch the signs of the times. Men and women no longer exhale that odor of refinement and circumspection that formerly existed. The two sexes have come to meet more on an equal footing. There is more personal liberty exercised by each. The rules of propriety have been stretched and liberalized to suit what our "advanced women" choose to call the "enlarged views of social duties and relations." Young women have assumed an air of independence; young men an air of indifference. And nowadays honest politeness seems to have been relegated to what we call the poorer classes, so that a woman is more apt to be offered a seat in a car by a laboring man than she is to receive a similar courtesy from a man supposed by birth and social conditions to be the workingman's superior. Is it the fault of the man? Hardly. He has heard women speak so much of the equality of the sexes that he is simply placing her on that footing. The taint has not touched the laborer, however—he instinctively rises to give his seat to the woman. The "new woman," the "advanced woman," the "equal rights woman," he knows not. He sticks to the customs of the past—the deference which he, perhaps, saw his father pay to his mother. He has not forgotten the old-time lesson that a woman should not be compelled to stand in a moving vehicle. All this foolishness about a woman being the equal of a man has not touched him. He knows that it is not so. He believes his mother or his wife to be morally his superior, but physically his inferior, and he does not propose to lower God's estimate to earthly conceptions. Homage is the true essence of politeness; and thank God the "advanced woman" has not killed it in some men yet.

**W**E need not go so far as to say that as men and women we are deteriorating, or that the social structure is in any danger of collapse. It is not so bad as that. But it is bad enough. New ideas have been interjected into our lives, and they have brought forth new conditions. Whereas, only a few years back, one sex occupied a position above the other, the two are now side by side competing fiercely in every occupation, in every branch of our life. Antagonisms have been born which hitherto have been unknown between the sexes. The aggressive spirit of the woman of "advanced" ideas has asserted itself. A new sense of self-reliance has been imbibed by women. And what is the result? Men have tacitly inferred that women scorn the sort of consideration which at one time they felt was their tribute to womanhood. Naturally, politeness has become lax, the grace of homage is often forgotten. The highest standard of manners cannot thrive in an atmosphere charged with rivalry and contention. Women first discovered this when they went into business; now they are experiencing it in their social relations. Happily, however, a quiet revulsion of feeling on this question of the sexes has slowly become noticeable, and the opinion is general that there has come a distinct turn in the tide, and it is well that it should be so, and that we may all look forward to a return of old-time politeness on the part of the men, and a gracious acceptance of it on the part of the women.

**T**O the sober-minded and clear-thinking people of this country the hollowness of this whole movement of "advanced rights" for women was apparent from the start. But, unfortunately, there is always a class which is ready to listen to new ideas or to try fresh experiments. The idea of a woman being placed in every respect on a basis of equality with a man had its undoubted attractions to the unthinking and the easily-influenced. But the cost was not considered, as it rarely is in such movements. Now the experiment has had its trial, and even the unthinking are coming around to the point of seeing that the results are not what they hoped for or were given to expect. And having swung around the circle, as we all do in some things, they are slowly but surely coming back to the point from whence they started. And, after all, when we come to think of it, that start was of Divine ordination, and was pretty wisely conceived. And although some zealous advocates of the movement have gone so far as to tamper with the Bible it was just as well, perhaps, that they should have gone just as far as they did. Nothing is sacred to reformers when they start out to reform, and it was unwise to expect, perhaps, that the reformers of womanhood would be more careful. But now the end is reached. There is nothing more in view. And the price which woman has been and is being asked to pay for her "increased privileges," she does not, naturally, care to give. And there we are: like the Biblical prodigal ready to go back. Fortunately, we have not outlived the possibility of a speedy and healthy return to that halcyon condition of things when the surpassing charm of civilization was the deference paid by men to women. Then the woman was the superior of the man. For a time now she has descended to be his equal. And so let us hope that she soon will be again upon her old pedestal. In the minds of clear-thinking men she has always been there. We have either amused ourselves, or been amused with the efforts to create a "new woman," or force certain fancied "rights" and "privileges" upon women. Unfortunately, our amusement in this respect has proven costly. And that is why it is time to stop, and stop now. We cannot afford to trifle with the relations of the sexes, and when fanciful ideas affect a deferential attitude in society-at-large, an attitude which means the protection of woman, the elevation of man and the uplifting of the whole social body, we are tampering with something which is dangerous. For without consideration, one for the other, or that sense of politeness which grows out of consideration, this would be a barren world indeed!