

THE RIGHT THING AT THE RIGHT MOMENT.

SECOND PAPER.



THE chief theme in my last paper on this subject was Tact and its concomitants. In my strain to-day the notes which I intend to strike will not ascend to any high pitch, nor will they compass any great depth ; but although, owing to the apparent insignificance of notes such as these, some

folk may not see any real use in their presence, or any true beauty in the correctness of tone ; and some folk may not perceive any want of harmony

caused by their absence, or any discordance produced, yet, notwithstanding this dulness of perception, small courtesies have in reality much to do with making life smooth and pleasant, and little rudenesses are sufficiently powerful to ruffle, or irritate, those who come in contact with them. My readers must not therefore sneer at, as useless or worthless, any of the small observances to which I draw attention in this paper.

There are many courtesies which a gentleman should render to a lady, the absence of which is at once felt, and causes people involuntarily to remark inwardly to themselves, if not aloud to their friends, "That man has not good manners." I passed that judgment the other evening when I was sitting with a friend by her fireside. A gentleman was ushered in who was well known to my friend, but a comparative stranger to me. He shook hands with her first, which was, of course, the right thing to do, and then, while speaking to her, he shook hands with me. The breaker of this law of courtesy was a young professional man, well endowed with this world's goods. I should not record this little rudeness if it was only of rare occurrence, but I often notice people guilty of this discourtesy—namely, that of shaking hands with one person while they are speaking to another person. If you wish to say more than "How do you do?" to your hostess, or to any one else whom you greet at first, it is less discourteous to continue your conversation with her for a few moments before taking notice of any one near her, than it is to stretch out your hand and shake that of her neighbour while your face is turned away and your lips are addressing another person.

The discourteous young man to whom I have alluded gave me another reason for my verdict, and as in this respect also he is by no means the only offender in general society, I shall mention the little rudeness. There are three, if not more, separate syllables and sounds which some people utter or make when they have not heard what has been said to them, or when they wish to express assent. These are—

What? Eh? Uh! and a guttural sound of the letter m, which cannot be expressed in writing. "I beg your pardon," or "What did you say?" are sentences which should certainly be said when a repetition is asked for ; and "Yes" should not be replaced by a grunt when an assent is given.

There are numerous little acts which a man of courtesy will perform. While he is calling at a house, he will rise and open the door for any lady who leaves the room, even if she is an entire stranger to him ; in his own house he will not only open the door of the room, but accompany the lady to the hall door, and open that, if there is no servant at hand to do so, for a departing guest, whether lady or gentleman, should not be left to find their way alone. Neither should they be allowed to find their way into a room. When you act as a host, and your guests accompany you into the drawing-room, do not you, my dear sir, follow the practice of some forgetful or neglectful men, who walk in and march straight up the room, leaving their one guest, or a train, as the case may be, to follow and to close the door. A host should open the door, and shut it after his guests have entered the room.

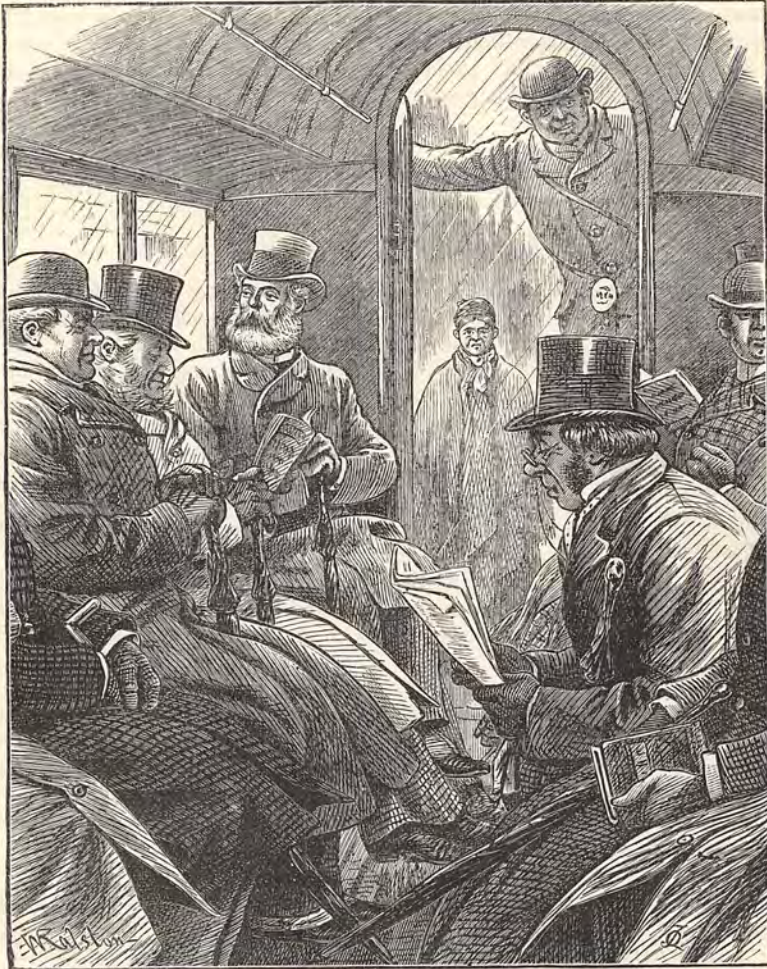
Amongst other small courtesies, a gentleman will rise from his chair, however luxuriously comfortable, and offer assistance, if need be, to a lady if she goes to put coals on the fire, or if she tries to open or close a window. When he escorts her into a room, he will see that she is seated before he looks for a chair for himself ; when he escorts her to a table, he will wait to arrange for her comfort, hold the chair, or push it backwards or forwards, as required, before he takes his own seat. And during the meal he will see that she is provided with all she is likely to want. The lady ought not to be obliged to ask for salt, for water, for another cup of tea, or, in fact, for anything that is on the table.

As we are on this subject, I must tell you how uncomfortable I felt at a dinner-party a few months ago, because, as I was put into this state of discomfort by a gentleman, it is well to record it as a hint as to the right thing at the right moment. My host introduced a gentleman to me, to take me in to dinner ; when that was announced as on the table, my partner offered his left arm. So far so good ; but he would march me off instantly. I ventured to suggest that we should delay our start for a few seconds. It was an awkward thing to have to remonstrate with your partner at the outset, but I felt it must be done. However, this had no effect, and I was obliged to yield the point, and the consequence was that we two were the first in the dining-room. Our host must have thought that we were both rude and greedy thus to precede those who ought to have taken precedence, and to appear in such undue haste to reach the table. I can only hope that the company imagined that the gentleman had carried me off, and not that I had induced him to make this unduly hurried flight from one room to the other !

To return to the small courtesies of which we were speaking anon :—

If a gentleman shows courtesy to a lady out of doors by picking up anything which she has accidentally dropped, he should raise his hat ; and if he unwittingly is guilty of any little rudeness, such as stepping on her dress or running against her, he should also raise his hat and apologise.

subterfuges employed to keep places for friends, or a larger space for convenience and comfort. It may be that these flecks and flaws are to be detected in men also. Perhaps they behave in this manner to one another, but my experience says they show courtesy to women. Let me here interpolate a few words to the ladies who receive these courtesies. I would beg them to remember that they are *courtesies*, and to treat them



“ ANY GENTLEMAN OBLIGE A LADY ? ”

In public buildings and conveyances of all kinds, and in crowded thoroughfares, there are always many opportunities of showing small courtesies. As far as my experience goes in this respect—and it is wide and that of a number of years—I could record innumerable small courtesies that I have received at all times and in all places; nor can I remember many little rudenesses shown by men. I am afraid that I cannot hold up my own sex in the same meritorious light. Too often the conduct of the majority is not praiseworthy when in a crowd.

There are the little rudenesses of pushing and scrambling for places, to say nothing of the small

as such, for I often notice that ladies appear to regard them as *services*, to be rendered to them as a matter of course. In one sense, they should be done as a matter of course; but the point upon which I would insist is that these attentions and offers of assistance, and bestowal of places and seats, are courtesies, and should be recognised as such, by courteous acknowledgments on the part of the recipients.

I am often indignant—I can assure you that is not too strong a term for the feeling roused within me—when I see members of my sex coolly and thanklessly accepting and taking seats offered to them by courteous men, who, according to the maxim of “ first

come first served" on the one hand, and according to the rule that having paid for a seat it is your possession, on the other hand, have a right to the occupation of those places or seats.

I grant that the right thing at the right moment is for gentlemen to offer their places to ladies who otherwise would have to stand throughout service, concert, or lecture, or who would lose the chance of riding in that omnibus; but clearly and undoubtedly the right thing at the right moment for the woman who accepts the courtesy (in many cases no small act) is to make a due acknowledgment, to bow to the donor—for it is a gift bestowed—and to tender her thanks. In large towns occurrences of this kind are hourly happening,

and therefore, although I have before alluded to this subject, I feel impelled to reiterate my words. I know by experience that it *is* exceedingly tiring to stand for an hour in a crowded room, that it *is* exceedingly miserable to stand in the rain and wind waiting for a place in an omnibus, that it *is* exceedingly uncomfortable to stand in an underground railway carriage while other passengers are seated. All these positions are veritable discomforts to every woman. When men take these discomforts themselves, and pass their secured comforts on to women, if these accept the courteous offer, they should show that they regard it as a courtesy rendered, and not as a service due to them.

A CURIOUS ROMANCE.



STANDING on London Bridge, leaning on the rails in the Rotten Row, on the top of a 'bus in the middle of a great "block," or lounging in some green oasis of garden, with just a peep at busy traffic by river or road, the thought will flash across the mind, what is to come after all this "tumult under a cloud"? as Victor Hugo describes it. Strolling in a park, with trees in avenues, or growing singly in their strength, with massive trunks and broad-spreading boughs; looking from green hill, or grey rock, or church tower over a world of meadows, with here and there a splash of yellow corn, a farmstead, or a white road, or a peep of the tall chimneys of a cotton or an iron town, the question will come unbidden, "If the hands of man were removed, what would happen to trees, hedgerows, meadows, corn, cattle, birds, and the passive and active forces making up the sum of visible things?" Mr. Richard Jefferies has answered both questions for us,* and the answer is a picture, a romance. It could not be otherwise, with his minute and homely familiarity with bird and beast, and the green things that make nature so wonderful a study.

After London, an age of brick and mortar, soot and cloud, bustle and invention, there came a marvellous change over everything. The fathers of the old men could remember a little of the early stages in the transformation. In the first spring after London ended it became green everywhere. There are quiet and singularly graphic touches of description to render us familiar with this relapse into barbarism. By a series of sketches we are enabled to see with

distinctness what would follow the abandonment of our towns and fields, the cessation of the labour that provides food for the million, the assertion in new and riotous strength of the life at work everywhere, and rarely thought of in our busy moments. We are interested in the changes themselves before we get a gleam of light upon the causes at work in leaving them free to come to pass. There is great art in this vagueness, and the traditions referred to are of a nature to suggest the uncertainties any remnant of an ancient race would feel. Some thought the level of the sea had altered; and as the sea was unknown beyond Ireland, there would only be vague theorising. Others, that an enormous dark body passed through space, altering the earth's orbit, and impelling men to return to the East. It was certain that when "the event took place," there was a general escape from the cities, the rich using their money to get away before the poor, leaving behind only the ignorant and the cultivators of the soil. "Of what became of the vast multitude that left the country nothing has ever been heard, and no communication has been received from them."

Nature began to assert her supremacy. The corn ripened, died away, and grew again in the fields. Sturdy wild plants, against which man had waged war, towered above the remnants of his crops. Tall thistles, ox-eye daisies, sorrel, wild carrots, and charlock covered any open spaces, till the original growths were killed. Footpaths soon disappeared, but bright strips of green showed where the roads had been. Aquatic grasses, flags, and reeds covered the pastures, and marched step by step from dykes and streams, overflowing the land and making sedgy swamps. The hedges pushed out luxuriantly until brambles and briars met in the centre of the largest fields. Mill-dams and bridges gave way. Towns were converted into swamps. Furze, heath, and copses of various trees spread out into the silent spaces about them. "By degrees the trees of the vale seemed as it were to invade and march up the hills." Even the downs were covered with scrub.

* "After London; or, Wild England."