

Etiquette Run Mad.

BY C. A. HALBERT.



WE, in this easy-mannered republic, can have little conception of the tyranny which etiquette has exercised in all the great courts of the world, and the imposing part it has played in the adjustment of grave national questions. *Here*, all our citizen kings can attend a reception at the White House without invitation, and with no forms of courtesy beyond those of ordinary good breeding. We feel only a sense of the ludicrous when we read of the fume and passion into which courtiers used to fall when offered a stool instead of a chair, in some royal drawing-room; placed at a feast, opposite the carver, or below one whom they assumed to outrank.

During the reign of Louis XIV., while a tremendous war was raging between France and Spain, the grand monarch and his favorite courtiers were amusing themselves with fêtes and balls among the marvelous groves, lakes, and fountains of Marly. One morning, the Duke of Villeroy, hot and dusty, came spurring to court with army dispatches. News of a decisive battle was hourly expected, and everybody awaited the opening of the papers with feverish impatience. But, unhappily, the minister whose duty it was to break the seal and present them to the king, was absent for the day. They might contain news of a defeat, of instant necessities, and changed instructions, but no matter, *etiquette* must not be violated though the heavens fall, and the haughty Louis, though dying with anxious suspense, went on with his childish masqueradings with serene countenance. The courier was obliged to skulk out of sight and affect not to exist till the return of the proper functionary, when he suddenly resumed himself and presented his dispatches, as if he had that moment arrived.

When Marie Antoinette, that charming, though somewhat volatile young princess, came over from simple-mannered Vienna to be the bride of the dauphin, she chafed much under the tedium of French etiquette. Her daily toilet was an affair of the most elaborate ceremony. Had she ventured to wash her own face or clasp her shoe-buckles, the whole court would have stood aghast with horror. Here is an example, one of many, showing how cruelly the rich, free life of the young princess was tortured and pressed into the iron mould of court ceremonial. On one occasion, a lady in waiting was about lifting the royal chemise over the royal shoulders, when the door opened and a second lady, superior in rank, entered. So the uplifted garment had to pause in mid air till number two could pull off her gloves and take it, and this happened thrice before the shivering young creature could be got into her clothes!

The making of treaties has often brought out the absurdities of hyper-etiquette in the most amusing manner. Indeed, the settlement of the order of ceremony and precedence of rank has frequently been the most perplexing part of the business. Take, for example, the congress assembled at Ryswick, in 1696, to arrange a peace between France and the allied powers. Before any serious business matter could be thought of, the rank and state of each power must be settled. The ambassador of Austria loftily demanded to sit higher at the council board than the ambassador of Spain, and also taking the right of way when their carriages met in the street. Two of these diplomatic fools, as Macaulay tells us, were mainly occupied in watching each other's legs. In their stately calls of ceremony, each was chiefly anxious not to advance more rapidly than the other, and if one "perceived he had inadvertently stepped forward too quick, he went back to the door, and the stately minuet began again."

There was endless wrangle as to how many horses each should be allowed, how many pages and servants, and whether these might carry canes and swords. "If you don't call me 'your Excellency,'" piped a little German state—with a territory about as big as a pocket-handkerchief—"we will call home our troops instanter." "If anybody crowds my horses from the spot I select," thundered Austria, "it'll be the worse for him," and forthwith the whole august body fell to debating on which particular rood of court-yard the imperial horses might stand. While the soldiers were dying in pestilent camps, and all Europe was faint under the exhaustion of a tremendous war, this tom-foolery went forward unblushingly month after month; and one cannot see how the mincing, and prancing, and bullying would ever have ended, had not William of Orange—the noblest Roman of them all—sent his envoy on the sly to meet the French envoy in an obscure little village, and there, walking up and down, under the apple-trees, they arranged the conditions of a peace which all the nations welcomed with a delirium of joy.

Earlier in the century, when England sent to arrange a marriage between Prince Charles and Henrietta of France, everything came to a halt on the mighty question, whether His Eminence, Cardinal Richelieu, should give his right hand to the ambassadors, and how many steps he should advance in conducting them out of the room. A messenger was about to be dispatched to consult the king of England in this grave difficulty when it fortunately occurred to somebody that if the cardinal would receive in bed, *etiquette* would be suspended. Accordingly he feigned sickness, went to bed, and without further diplomacy the marriage settlements were made.

Few things in the records of the olden centuries are more amusing than those which relate the entanglements of court ceremonial. The office of Lord Chamberlain or Master of Ceremonies required the nicest diplomatic tact and the discretion of a prime minister. One noble guest demanded that his note of invitation should be the exact fac-simile of some other, and a second higgled about the precise

inch of tablecloth upon which his plate should stand!

But in no court has the spirit of punctilio been carried to such absurd lengths as in the Spanish. There was a time when His Most Catholic Majesty's ambassador at St. James blustered because at some court ceremonial the Dutch ambassador was allowed to stand in the next room, "with only a thin wainscoat board between, and a window which might be opened." One Spanish monarch actually fell a martyr to etiquette. He was sitting before the fire when it began to roar furiously, and he ordered an attendant marquis to dampen it; but that grandee was an even greater devotee of etiquette, and refused to do it—somebody else, then absent, being lord of the poker. The king would not budge an inch, if he died for it—to move his own chair not being allowable—and so he sat with stubborn courage before the furnace till the blue blood of Castile boiled in his veins. Erysipelas set in and the royal fool was soon gathered ingloriously to his fathers.

Disraeli relates another curious and almost incredible instance. The royal palace was on fire, and a princess of the blood stood unrescued in her apartment. Neither prince nor noble volunteered to peril his own life for hers, till at last a plain rough soldier rushed up the burning staircase and brought her down safely in his arms. But alas, *etiquette*, august, sacred etiquette had been outraged, and the brave fellow was condemned to death, neither prince nor noble remonstrating, and he would have been executed had not the rescued lady at last besought his life!

But the despotism of etiquette is vastly mitigated in this nineteenth century. The sanctity of punctilio and the "divine right of kings" are, happily, buried in one grave. The monarchs of Christendom are, as a rule, high-mannered gentlemen, and walk about in plain clothes with neither diamonds nor aureoles on their heads. A princess may wear a "russet gown" and ride in a public conveyance, and the most august female sovereign in the world, although clinging pertinaciously to the traditions of courts, does not think she stoops when she teaches a Sabbath-school class and reads the Bible in the cottages of the poor.

Who that saw the Brazilian Emperor moving among us three summers ago, so bright, manly and purposeful, choosing the top of an omnibus to a sumptuous carriage if thereby he might grasp a thought or an impression to carry home and work into the civilization of his own people, did not say, "here is the true divinity that hedges kings."

A BLACK LILY.—A recent traveler in Syria found what he calls a black calla. It had a leaf exactly like that of a calla lily, and a flower nearly the shape of the blossom, only not quite so open and flaring. It had a large and long pistil the color of the inside of the flower, which was a rich, velvety black, or, in some lights, dark maroon, while the outside was green. It was a superb plant, and he tried to get up a bulb to bring home, but failed in the attempt. He saw two specimens.