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SUPER-REFINEMENT is to good manners what prudery is to modesty. Both imply a lurking doubt of oneself, both result in exaggeration. Happy are they whose morals and manners alike are sound; to them refinement is an instinct, not a pose. To be genuine, refinement must be unstudied; conscious refinement is akin to vulgarity. The man—and more especially the woman—who pauses to assume a correct mental attitude is lost. Good manners should be an outward sign of inward grace—the result of a cultivated mind and heart.

The super-refined cultivate their manners not wisely but too well, and leave their hearts as they found them, mere organs for blood-pumping. Their aim is not to express but to conceal what they feel. Like Chinese artificers who reproduce a steam-engine with external fidelity, even to faults in the metal and shades in the paint, but omit the works, the over-refined are incapable of discriminating between accidents and essentials.

Vulgarity in its different forms argues a certain amount of civilisation. It is unknown among savages, wherein they are superior. Its subtlest and least eradicable manifestation is super-refinement. If the vulgar, like the poor, are always with us, let us, in heaven's name, have the man who slaps one on the back, wears his hat on the side of his head, and eats peas with his knife, the woman who murders the Queen's English and drinks tea from a saucer. About these there is at least

no pretence. They set up for nothing, and show their deficiencies with a simplicity that disarms criticism. Such people may have in them elements of greatness. To esteem, even to love them, is possible, but love and esteem enter not into the sentiments wherewith we regard the super-refined.

Aggressive to the weak, submissive to the strong, satisfied with themselves, assured that anyone who differs from them is benighted, contemptuous of the ignorance of those who know as much as they, expounders of the commonplace, explainers of the obvious, they are intolerable. Learned on points of etiquette, they have studied manuals or caught up axioms, and know exactly what is forbidden; they are never so sure as to what is allowed. They understand that to be well-bred is to be superior, but not that it is possible to be too superior to be well-bred.

To them man was made for manners, not manners for man, and primed at second hand with ill-digested information, they would rather die than infringe arbitrary laws that to them are sacred and immutable. "The Habits and Customs of Good Society" is their Bible, "vulgarity" the deadly sin. So great is their horror of it that they grow vulgar in avoiding it.

Having mastered the rules they have no mind for exceptions. To them circumstances never alter cases; their knowledge is, as it were, docketed and pigeon-holed, and all that is not white is black.

The Book they venerate says, for example,

that people are not supposed to know each other until they have been introduced, so the super-refined keep a stony, British stare in reserve to freeze simple, genial souls who make advances. The Book says that at dinner no one should partake twice of soup. The super-refined would starve rather than ask for a second helping, even if soup were the only decent item on a hotel menu. They sacrifice daily to a deity contemptuous or oblivious of their homage, whereas well-bred people suit themselves and trust their own instincts, knowing that it is better to

their interest to suggest that he or she and they alone differ from the common herd.

They have raised to a fine art the faculty for making others feel small and uncomfortable, without saying anything that can be laid hold of. They have no depth of character or feeling, a lying tongue, a short memory, no geniality, no sense of humour, and an immense but ill-founded appreciation of themselves. They generally go in fear of those who know their relatives or early surroundings, as these rarely accord with their present pretensions.



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do wrong with easy grace than to be tremulously correct.

The Book says it is wrong to boast, and this to the super-refined is a sore trial, since they have an irresistible impulse in that direction. Accordingly they make a compromise. They do not say straight out, "We are very grand people, accustomed to move in the highest circles, and think but meanly of you." They humiliate their hearers by less direct methods, and try to impress rather by insinuation than by overt bragging, wherein they are distinguished from the simple snob, whose blunter weapons they despise. They obliquely and indirectly assert their superiority to the person they are addressing, unless it be to

Simple country people, the young, the foolish, and the ignorant fall an easy prey to the super-refined. Such persons have been known to boast of being acquainted with them. Until seen through, indeed, they are imposing. They abash modest merit unused to their methods, and too polite or too timid to pay them back in their own coin.

At first they appear well-bred, even scrupulously well-bred, but a closer view shows they are not gentle, they are only genteel. Just as paste, when placed at a certain angle and discreetly illuminated, is, if anything, more brilliant than diamonds, the super-refined, under favourable conditions, succeed, to the unpractised eye, in outshining the really refined. As the jeweller,

however, can always tell the false from the real gem, the man or woman of the world speedily detects the super-refined. There is monotony in their methods, and to know one is to know all.

A certain set of people—a class peculiar to the British islands—are for ever questioning their own gentility and that of others, tearing up, as it were, their manners by the roots to see how they grow. "Is she quite a lady?" they ask. "Is he quite a gentleman?" "Is this what a lady should do?" "If I wear a green necktie will it be gentlemanly?" From their ranks are evolved the super-refined. Those to the manner born do not question; they take themselves and their friends for granted.

There is something, however, to be said for super-refinement. In a world mainly composed of fools it is not without its advantages. Its pretensions are so obvious that they impress the very dullest, and the good word of the dull is powerful. Should any of our readers, therefore, think it worth while to pass for persons of taste, culture, high birth and exquisite superiority amongst the large body of those who know no better, the following hints will enable them to enter with safety the ranks of the super-refined.

In the first place it is a good idea to tell people things they know, with an air of imparting information. The manner must imply, "You of course are unaware of this." Manner being intangible and undefinable is a useful weapon in abasing others, as in case of unpleasantness arising it may be denied. Simple remarks as to the Continent, high life, or the royal family may easily be framed so as to show conviction of the hearer's ignorance. The tamest possible sentence—for example, "We always have thin bread and butter at afternoon tea"—may, by a lofty air and a judicious accentuation of "we" and "thin," be made to express conviction that the person addressed prefers a loaf cut in hunks at that cheerful repast. This method has the advantage of admitting no reply; the fact is incontrovertible, while a mere "So do I" from the victim sounds like an effort to set him or herself right with a sceptical world.

An effective way of showing superiority is to assume ignorance of everyday affairs. An inquiry as to what this or that is used for—it should be some common article, for the super-refined must know or pretend to know all that is rare and extraordinary—will effectually embarrass a timid hostess, who sees at once that her style of living is not what

her guest has been accustomed to. Listeners will be immensely impressed, and this is naturally what the super-refined desire.

If one's relatives have been something in the City, it is advisable to affect a horror of business and an incapacity for mastering its details. The more effectually to throw people off the scent, admiration may be expressed for those who have some knowledge of such matters, and if they have made some obvious remark, they should be told "how clever" they are, and "how much they know about that sort of thing." Naturally this childlike ignorance must not interfere with keeping a sharp eye to one's own interests.

Formerly it was necessary that all the acquaintances of the super-refined should be "ladies" and "gentlemen," but, as this is no longer fashionable, they may now admit that they know mere men and women, if they make it plain that they do not mean it.

In literature they will find few recent writers to suit them. Their favourites will be Ouida and Bulwer Lytton. Dickens should be termed "vulgar" and Thackeray "so very satirical." It is an excellent rule for them, if any book or play be praised, to say they find it "poor," but they should not be entrapped into giving reasons for their opinion.

Everything outspoken and unconventional should be avoided by the super-refined. That persons of title can do no wrong may be taken as a safe rule. To introduce their names is the mere A B C of super-refinement; but it is well, if possible, to have some more intimate acquaintance with royalty and the aristocracy than may be gleaned from buying a doll from a duchess at a bazaar. This knowledge is usually acquired by living with or meeting them in a subordinate capacity, or having relatives thus fortunately placed. One will then be justified in saying that "The princess is a sweet girl," or that "the kindness shown by the dear countess" to the speaker "can never be forgotten." Finally, they should apologise for everything, especially for employing any familiar but inoffensive locution. If it be desired to use a common proverb, such as "A cat has nine lives," or "The pot called the kettle black," it should be preaced by saying, "Pray do not think it coarse of me."

In conclusion, those who wish to be super-refined must never be natural, must never let themselves go, and though popularity need not be expected, most people will consider them very superior, and manifest a desire to stand well with them. As to the others—they may say they are vulgar.