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The upper Rhine

the scenery of its banks and the manners of its people

Mayence to the lake of Constance

Mayhew, Henry

London, 1858

§ 2. Feminine Honours-Low-bred look of the Prussian "Excellences" and "Magnificences"-Forms of Politeness-Bowing in the Streets-Importance of the "Blick"

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Visual Library

pedestal of the same material. It bears the following inscription:—

BERTHOLD SCHWARZ.
ERECTED IN THE YEAR 1853,
IN
COMMEMORATION OF THE FIFTH CENTENARY
OF
THE DISCOVERY OF GUNPOWDER.

The precise date of the *German* discovery is stated at 1340; but since it is proven that the Venetians employed cannon in the year 1300, and the composition of the marvellous powder is, moreover, expressly described by our own Roger Bacon, in his treatise "*De Nullitate Magiæ*," which was published at Oxford in 1216, we cannot exactly admit the claims of the Franciscan monk to the invention.

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§ 2.

FEMININE HONOURS—LOW-BRED LOOK OF THE PRUSSIAN "EXCELLENCES" AND "MAGNIFICENCES"—FORMS OF POLITENESS—BOWING IN THE STREETS—IMPORTANCE OF THE "BLICK."

Burlesque as the Teutonic titulary forms may sound to Englishmen, still those applied to the wives and daughters of the so-called dignitaries are more "extravagansical;" for the titles of married women are the same as those of their husbands, even though the titular prefix of the latter be expressive

of some civil or military duty performed by gentlemen only. Thus, the lady of one of the Ministers of State is not only addressed as "your Excellency," but styled in addition, "Most highly-honoured Mrs. State-Minister*ess*." In like manner, too, the fair partner of a Lieutenant-General is called "*Dread* and *most powerful* Mrs. Lieutenant-General*ess*"—as if the latter lady were really one of the leaders of the Prussian Amazons, and the former were a member of the petticoat government of the country.

Indeed, whatever function the husband virtually performs in the state, the wife does so *nominally*. Hence, in German society, you are introduced to a swarm of Mrs. Counselloress*es*, and Doctoress*es*, and Railway-Directoress*es*, and Police-Inspectoress*es*, and Barristeress*es*—together with a multitude of other Mrs. High-and-Mightiness*es*.

True, the marital honours of literature and science have not yet been appropriated by the German wives in common with those of the State—though surely a lady has as much to do with the composition of her husband's book as with his last Act of Parliament, and is as much entitled to take rank as a labourer in the field of science as she has to be styled a leader in the field of battle. Hence, though the country has not yet classed among its dignitaries THE HIGHLY-IMAGINATIVE MRS. AUTHORESS-OF-THE-"SONG-OF-THE-BELL"-AND-"WALLENSTEIN" SCHILLER, it may nevertheless soon have to number among its she-bigwigs THE RIGHT-PHILOSOPHICAL MRS. INVENTRESS-OF-THE-GUN-COTTON SCHÖNBEIN,—or MRS. DISCOVERESS-OF-THE-CHEMISTRY-OF-ANIMAL-AND-VEGETABLE-PHYSIOLOGY LIEBIG.

Now, it would hardly be believed that a nation of people possessing more than an egg-cup full of brains could descend to this mere child's play at grandeur, under the idea of such

big names having the least smack of dignity about them. But so it is—and in educated Prussia, too; where, if you believe the simple natives, every other man is either a poet or philosopher!

If, however, such titles sound like insanity to those who have never lived in the country, assuredly they seem like downright idiocy when you come to get a peep at the feminine "Excellences" and "Magnificences" to whom they are applied; for the titled ladies may be seen creeping in and out their rooms, till twelve in the day, in their filthy chintz bed-jackets (white night-gowns being articles of luxury in which their "noblenesses" never indulge), and with their unkempt heads encased in night-caps that are worn for six weeks at a stretch—so as to save the necessity of washing the pillow-cases oftener than once a-quarter.

Yet these same draggletail bits of beggarly pride, who look neither as respectable nor as tidy in the morning as the cooks that are seen cleaning the door-steps in the London streets, are such sticklers for their full allowance of nominal dignity, that we have positively known a Mrs. Architectress give her maid-of-all-work warning for omitting to address her, while handing her a glass of water, as "most *gracious* madam." Nor is it unusual for the wife of a petty official to call back a peasant, who has happened to pass her in the garden without raising his hat, and say to him, with a toss of her head, "Do you know, man, I am the Mrs. Medicinal-Councilloress, and yet you dare to go by me with your cap on?"

Moreover, the daughters expect to be *titulirt* (betitled) as well as the wives,—standing out for their "*gracious Fräulein*" as vigorously as their tom-fool of a mother does for her "*gnädigste Frau.*" This, too, the young ladies demand, even while helping the servant to lay the cloth or make the beds,—for the titled Misses are expected to save the expense of another do-

mestic by assisting in the duties of the house; and we ourselves have seen the daughter of a Prussian banker engaged in opening the parlour shutters outside the windows on a Sunday morning.

The reader, however, must not imagine that we believe such acts to be mean or degrading in themselves; on the contrary, our object is merely to draw attention to the contemptible absurdity of people, who are compelled to be industrious, aping the pomps and vanities of those who can afford to be idle. What we really desire to see is industry possessed of sufficient moral courage to claim rank upon its own merits, and not be itself the first to cast a stigma upon its function by assuming that other social positions are more honourable than its own.

Nor have we, on the other hand, any disposition to decry an aristocracy of birth or possessions as a social institution: for there is not one of us, however violently opposed to hereditary honours, that would not rather have sprung from the family of the Russells than that of the Greenacres; and we know full well, that so long as wealth is to the million the most desirable of all things in the world, so long must the possessors of it seem the most admirable and powerful in the nation. Still we cannot but hold *that* lordly pride in derision which assumes that there is necessarily any innate nobility connected with a mere grandiloquent cognominal prefix (a prefix that is simply a state-flam at best), and which not only arrogates to itself the highest mental and moral excellence solely on account of its nominal superiority, but has the insolence to affect to scorn the very industry or commerce from which, by a lucky accident merely, it has escaped.

From the tenor of our remarks, the reader will not accuse us of any extreme patrician or plebeian tendencies; we can, therefore, without fear of being thought prejudiced in favour

of lordly qualities, confess that our "higher classes" appear to us to bear all the impress of "high breeding" in their features and frames—it being as easy to distinguish an English noble from an English navvy as it is to tell a blood-horse from a cob.

It is but natural, too, that such should be the case: for it is well known to physiologists that the superior housing and feeding of animals, called the "domestication" of them, tends not only to change the character of the tissues, but to modify the development of the very bones themselves,—the pig, in its wild state, having its hinder legs considerably higher, and its back consequently less straight, than its "dairy-fed" descendant.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that a race of people who, like the aristocracy of England, have for a long course of years neither had their bodies stinted by want or bad food, nor their tissues hardened by continuous labour, nor their skin and complexions tanned by long exposure to the weather, should be characterised by the most perfect regularity and softness of feature, as well as by the extreme delicacy of their hands and feet.

Surely such results are no more extraordinary than that one should find among savage tribes a prevalence of high cheek bones and prognathous jaws; or, more strange than that, the feet of slaves, whose forefathers never knew the protection of a shoe, should have a peculiar flat conformation by which to distinguish them.

Now, if there be truth in the above principles, it must be confessed that the German nobles have few external marks of what is called "blood" about them. But when we come to contrast the state of domestic comfort in Deutschland with that prevailing throughout our own country, and to see how deficient the houses of the rich are in all matters of comfort and cleanliness, as well as ventilation and sanitary regulations, as compared with those in England; and to notice, moreover,

the coarseness of the food common to the German people, —the delight of all in raw fish and sour putrid cabbage —we can hardly be surprised to find even the best-conditioned of the Deutschers with features and complexions barely as refined-looking as the English domestic servants.

At Ems one sees what is called the most "select" portion of the nation concentrated, occasionally, under one roof; and there we find men with stars at their breasts, having skins about as coarse and brown as the well-known freckly sheepskin binding to our school-books; and *Grosherzogins* and *Gräffins* with cheeks as florid as poppies, and mouths as ill-formed as those of bull-dogs; while their hands are almost as huge and red as the painted tin signs that are hung outside the French glovers, and their feet as splay as those of the London policemen, and possessed of no more instep than a duck.

Then, what a certain criterion is the female voice as to the culture and gentleness of the individual; and assuredly as the vocal tones are the exponents of our emotions (or, as Dr. Reid has called them, "the natural cries," by which infants, and even animals, are able instinctively to understand the passions affecting us for the time being), even so is it impossible for an affectionate-natured and kind-hearted woman to speak in harsh accents, or to utter words in a tone that grates upon the ear like the creaking of some jail-door.

We may be judging the Prussian ladies unfairly, but we *must* say we never heard one gentle-voiced woman during the whole of our stay in the country—the majority of the *Fraus* and *Fräuleins* having positively as husky throats as costermongers, and many so masculine an utterance, that on hearing them speak outside our door we have often mistaken them for gentlemen. The defect may be partly owing to the national habit of indulging in rough sour drinks; though even *that* cannot account for the utter want of tenderness in the

tones, which, we fear, can but proceed from an imperfect development of the softer emotions of the feminine character.

There remain but a few other social forms and ceremonies to be cited as distinctive of the Prussian people.

In all countries we find a considerable part of the etiquette to consist of certain kinds of bodily gestures and movements, which may be called the *pantomime of politeness*, and which are usually considered as characteristic of what "Jenkins" of the "Post" styles "breeding:" and certainly, if a man salute another by pulling his head down into a bow by means of his front hair, even an ascetic would be able to distinguish the class among which he had been reared.

Indeed, the most philosophical of men can hardly help judging people by the grace and ease of their muscular motions. That angularity of action which is called "awkwardness," is not only ugly in itself, from its violation of the curvature of line upon which some consider the beauty of form to depend, but it is offensive, because it either shows such a stiffness of joint as is consequent upon hard labour and defective housing, or indicates a sense of constraint arising from a feeling of unfitness on the part of the individual for the society amid which he is placed.

The polite pantomime of Englishmen, doubtlessly, appears to foreigners to be of so staid a quality as to induce a notion either of extreme haughtiness or coldness on the part of the people. But certain it is, that the reduction of these same salutatory gesticulations to the least possible bowings and scrapings, betrays perhaps more *real* heartiness on the part of our countrymen, than does the violent extravagance of action —that "tombeler"-like oscillation of the body, as well as that puppet-like, paroxysmal jerking of the limbs, which stands for warmth of feeling in foreign nations.

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Englishmen know full well that these mere muscular marks of respect can be imitated with ease, and therefore *assumed* by those who are really impressed with the very opposite feeling to that which their gestures would signify; and assuredly on the Continent, though all indulge in the caricature of bodily emotions, none for a moment *believe* in such displays.

Further, it is uncongenial to the nature of an Englishman, on his first introduction to a stranger, to pretend to any excessive veneration for a person with whose character he is most probably wholly unacquainted.

Foreigners, however, think differently on such subjects, and we have seen a Parisian beau go half-way down the Boulevards, with his hat in his hand, as, bowing, he jabbered those social taradiddles called compliments to a couple of be-crinolined old dames, whom, perhaps, in his heart he was wishing at the bottom of the Seine.

In Prussia, it was formerly the fashion to see which could outdo the other in the enormity of his gesticulations when any acquaintance was recognised in the street; for then literally a bowing-match commenced, and he was considered the most polite who by his perseverance obtained the last scrape.

Matters are hardly carried to such an extreme now-a-days, even in a nation which has made less progress than any other during the past century. Nevertheless, you find in the Rhenish capital at the present time a style of manners that carries your mind back to the days of Louis Quatorze; for the would-be elegance of the German gentry has all that burlesque style of grace about it which formed part of the old "Minuet de la Cour."

It is still a custom in Coblenz, if a party of gentlemen be walking together, and one of them happen to meet a friend by the way, for the whole of the company (though utter

strangers to the individual) to bare their head to their friend's friend. Hence, if you chance to form one of three or four in a promenade, your hat has to be removed from your head just that number of times more than it would be if you were strolling alone.

Moreover, the German salute is really a work of no mean labour; for when we said above that the head must be *bared* to all acquaintances passed in the street, we used the phrase advisedly, since a Prussian would hardly give a "*danke*" for a slight elevation of the hat—the approved sign of respect, as indicated by the beaver, being not only to remove it bodily from the head, but to describe a semi-circle with it at arm's length, and so bring it almost to the ground. This, as may be readily expected, is sad trying work to the brim, and we have known many a "*gibus*" give way in that part to even a small circle of acquaintances after a month's wear.

Nor is it only your *acquaintances* who demand this bare-headed reverence: politeness says, that you must uncover yourself not only to those you really respect, but also to "your butcher, your baker, your candlestick-maker," for whom, perhaps, owing to their scoundrelly adulterations and commercial meannesses, you have a hearty contempt.

In polite Paris you raise your hat, of course, to "*la dame du comptoir*," who sits in an arbour of "*desserts*," or else in a grotto crystalline with innumerable "*portions*" of lump-sugar, either at the *restaurant* or the *café* you frequent. You bow also to the pretty cigar-girl where you buy your packet of "*corporal*." You raise your hat, too, on entering the omnibus that is to carry you by "*correspondance*" even to the very gates of ———, the "*Barrière d'Enfer*," we mean.

In Coblenz you might, in deference to the national custom,

perhaps, be induced to do the same thing were there any pretty "*dames du comptoir*," lively cigar-girls, or, indeed, any omnibuses to carry you anywhere—if we except the prison-van-like conveyance to Ems, in which it is impossible to see your fellow-travellers for tobacco smoke.

In the Rhenish capital, everybody bares his head to everybody. Little boys drag their caps off to their teachers—lodgers uncover themselves to their fellow-lodgers as they pass them on the joint-stock stairs. In the street, too, you have either to take off your hat to the procession of pilgrim-farmers and market-women with a "*geistlich*," old gentlemen in lace petticoats and fur tippets squalling hymns at their head; or you are expected to give a jerk down, as if you were going upon your bended knees, while you snatch your profane beaver from your caput in reverence for some small boy in a scarlet serge gown, who is carrying a silver crucifix on a pole before a masculine old woman of a priest.

Or else you have to uncover yourself to some passing hearse, for the beavered head is considered disrespectful, not only to the living, but to the dead.

So that, what with bowing to priests, and pilgrim processions, and fellow-lodgers, and tradesmen, and friends, and acquaintances, and—Heaven save the mark!—to corpses, the arm fairly aches before you get home, whilst the limp state of your hat-brim soon makes you disgusted with the inanity of the ceremony.

The Prussians, however, delight in such tomfoolery, and we have seen an antiquated "blood"—a kind of dandy Methuselah—at the public gardens at Moselweis, stand bare-headed for about a quarter of an hour, in the attitude in which our own obsequious Simpson loved to welcome visitors to the "ROYAL PROPERTY," and with his poor bald old noddle baking like a dumpling in the sun, while he mumbled small nothings to a

group of dames, whose figures and movements were about as graceful as those of a hippopotamus.

The Prussian officers, on the other hand, never uncover, their usual mode of salute being by placing the hand at the side of the head, in the same manner as a deaf man does when he requests you to "speak up." To do the military gentlemen justice, too, they certainly endeavour to be more sprightly in their manners on recognising a lady out-of-doors than was the aforesaid Teutonic Simpson; though this sprightliness consists of a succession of indescribable bobs and scrapes —such as dogs give with their hind legs when kicking up the hay in a field.

Indeed, it seems to be a vulgar error on the part of the German gentry, that the jigging of the body gives apparent lightness to the movements; for you will see fat ungainly-looking *Fraus* begin skipping about, immediately on being introduced to a gentleman, as if they were some corpulent coryphée practising their steps behind the scenes at the Opera.

The Germans, moreover, pay great attention to what they call the "*Blick*" (*Angl.* the look); and in their "*Complimentir-Bücher*"—their "Books of Etiquette" (and, though such works are generally somewhat caricatures of the manners of a people, they may still be cited as indices of that which is supposed to constitute politeness by the large majority of the trading classes) we are told that there are five kinds of "looks" which people should take pains to cultivate.

"If you wish to make your fortune in the world," says the "*Neuestes*," Manual of Politeness, "you should accustom your eye to such looks as will suit everybody. The following are the different looks necessary to be observed:—

"(1.) *The open look;* that is to say, the candid, soft, smiling, and trusting look. It shows attention and sympathy, as well

as noble consciousness. This is the look to excite confidence and affection.

"(2.) *The firm look*, which can meet the gaze of other men with composure. It shows firmness and sincerity of character, as well as manly courage, determination, and truthfulness.

"(3.) *The modest look.* This displays our own humility or gratitude for a past favour. It always wins the heart.

"(4.) *The friendly look*, by which we express our regard for a person. This makes us agreeable and beloved.

"(5.) *The cheerful look*, from which all gloominess and melancholy are banished. It shows contentment of mind, and often speaks more than the most impassioned conversation.

"These are the five looks," adds the author, "which one should cultivate. By them we can win the hearts of others, and, therefore, we should work hard to become perfect in their use."

To us, however, such "looks" are simply acted lies—facial falsities that would reduce politeness to mere elegant hypocrisy. True politeness, on the contrary, it appears to us, springs from a consideration for the feelings of others, and all its best forms arise out of an indisposition to wound, as well as a desire to please those with whom we may happen to be associated. But such as would endeavour to uphold cheats and tricks as grace of manner—and that merely with the view of promoting our own interest by their use—are not only ignorant of what good manners really consist, but would degrade that which, when rightly viewed, is strictly the Christianity of every-day life—the assumption of an air of loving-kindness—into the artifices and snares of that counterfeit "*gentleman*" the "Prince of Darkness."

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