

NOTES

American Wit

The following samples of recent American wit may be new to some of our readers and boring to others. However, our defence is that two very wise men, one King Solomon and the other Wolfgang von Goethe, confessed that the writer who tries to be original is a fool:

European diplomatists are reminded that between an idea and an ideal there is a "I" of a difference.—*Manila Bulletin*.

The book of etiquette tells you everything except how to retrieve the roast from a guest's lap.—*St. Joseph News-Press*.

Speaking of the watch on the Rhine, it is a hunting case, but doesn't seem to be gold-filled.—*Shanghai Weekly Review*.

Experience is what you find when you are looking for something else.—*Toledo Blade*.

The reason why ideas die quickly in some heads is because they suffer from solitary confinement.—*Associated Editors, Chicago*.

The Ten Best Books

The argument concerning the ten best books of recent times goes on still in some American papers. We notice that one writer wants to know the reason why James Stephens is left out by so many critics. He says that *Demi-Gods, Here Are Ladies*, and *The Crock of Gold*, ought to be included in a selection made by every right-minded critic. James Stephens is in truth a writer too little known, but probably the reason is because he is a poet and a genius. The fact that a book like *Babbitt* is on many lists while *The Crock of Gold* is omitted is surely an indictment against the taste and good judgment of the present generation of critics. Making due allowance for an Irishman's prejudice in favor of a fellow-countryman, we hold that Stephens, whether in prose or verse, is one of the modern writers best worth reading. It is a sign of some saving grace to find Conrad in a few lists, but it is a sign of extraordinary shallowness to find Wells represented by his alleged history.

Lending Books

We retract all we ever said that was likely to persuade people that we regarded borrowers of books as the supreme nuisance. In the light of recent research we have changed our opinion. The real nuisance is the borrower who lends your books to others. There is a hope of throttling the conscientious borrower and of getting back your property when you want it, but hope dies when you ask for your book and learn that it has been lent without any authority whatsoever to some unscrupulous person who probably has lent it to somebody who will sell it at the nearest second-hand book-store. There is something ethically wrong in lending a book that has been lent to one. It is yours to read and to return but not yours to lend to another. The morality of many book-borrowers is on a lower level than that of horsedealers, who are supposed to follow David Harum's motto: Do to the other fellow what you think he would like to do to you, and do it first. It is only when one has need of a book he once bought, and seeking it finds it absent, that he begins to remember all the hard things that might be said about book-borrowers and heathens and publicans.

Table Manners

It is probable that the most infallible indications of good-breeding are dress and table manners. The man or woman who is well dressed is the one who causes no comment, no wonder, no surprise: in a word, the one who appears *comme il faut*. The same thing applies to the table. It is well put by a child, whose wise remarks are quoted in the *Literary Digest*: "I asked her

how she knew that a friend of ours whom she had just met at dinner was used to luxury and refinement.

"'Oh,' she said, 'When he was at table I never noticed him eating at all. He seemed to be just talking and having a good time, and yet he must have eaten sometime because his plate was nearly always empty when they took it away.'"

Gilett Burgess, commenting on the child's remarks, says: "Just as a well dressed man or woman is so considered because nothing eccentric or conspicuous or ugly is worn, so a cultured dinner guest is one whose manners are not memorable. Let us examine in this light the manipulations of these Banjoists and Cup-Cuddlers. Are their faults merely violations of Fashion's dogmatic requirements? No: the established canons of good taste at the table are founded on something more real.

"For eating there is a Golden Rule: Don't do anything you dislike to see others do! Indeed the basic theory of all etiquette is ethical. It ordains that *one's own comfort should be made secondary to that of others.*"

Gilett Burgess is right. Unselfishness is the essential foundation. Hence, good manners are a part of Christian training, and a real Christian will naturally be polite because he will be unselfish, while a selfish person will never have more than a thin veneer of manners because he has no more than a veneer of Christianity. Consideration for others is the law of courtesy and it is fundamental in Christian doctrine too.

But what are the Banjoists and the Cup-Cuddlers to which Mr. Burgess refers? The Banjoists are the people who do not know how to hold a knife and fork—and they are legion, in every class. The Cup-Cuddlers (mostly feminine) are those who cuddle their tea-cup to their mouths in both hands. He also scarifies the Front Entrance person, who takes soup from the tip of the spoon instead of from the side; and the suction-pumper, who advertises emphatically to the whole company that he is sucking up liquid food. He has a word of ridicule, too, for the Shampoo person who wears a napkin as he would wear a hairdresser's apron, and for the Sword-Swallower, who eats with his knife, and for the Harpooner, who harpoons apples or potatoes with knife or fork. There is also "Lizzie-Lick-the-Spoon," and her male counterpart, of whom he writes:

"Oh, that spoon, that simple, little dangerous spoon! It will tell more about you, sometimes, than the lines on your palm. Look out! Stir your tea with it one minute too long, too eagerly, and you'll understand why she said 'No.' Leave it sticking upright in your cup, and your name is Cecoby." Of the misuse of the spoon, he says: "It puts the owner outside the social pale, just as unmistakably as would dirty hands at table.

"And so does the Harpoon. Now, quite irrespective of its being a violation of any arbitrary rule, isn't it rather impulsive and conspicuous to reach out over the table with your fork and spear a piece of bread, and so carry it back to your own plate? If it is, then certainly it is bad manners. Why should anyone be afraid to take it with the hand?"

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