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WHAT IS A GENTLEMAN?

The subject of this article occurred to me in the following manner: I had paid the cabman, who had brought me to the railway station, his precisely correct fare, and he had held the money as a matter of course, in the palm of his horny hand, and demanded "what was that for," as though there was no such thing in the world as a table of cab-fares, and I had replied by entering into the demand and supply question in general, more especially on its bearing in connection with street locomotion, which I find is a better plan than using strong language, and has more effect. When I had finished a rather elaborate dissertation on this subject, which I hope enlarged his mind, I showed him the table of distances, which convinced it. He climbed up slowly into his perch, the fear of the law alone preventing him from indulging in a personal assault, and grunted out "you, a gentleman!" There was, no doubt, by his tone and manner that the sentence was elliptical, and meant that I was not a gentleman. This circumstance afforded me food for reflection, and set me thinking upon what a gentleman is supposed by different classes of people to be, and what not to be. I am afraid that this term "gentleman" is generally applied by the lower

classes to those of their superiors who are most lavish and extravagant. Rarely is an instance to be found in which the parvenu who scatters his money broadcast, does not meet with a greater meed of respect than is doled out to the scion of a once noble but now decayed house; but let him only become prudent, and he is likely to meet with unpleasant comparisons. "He, a gentleman!" "Noa, noa," says Hodge, "there's nothing like blood"—except money. The middle classes—by which everybody means the class that is below him—are very tenacious of this title. "A gentleman of my acquaintance," they say, instead of a "friend of mine," as it is expressed by the class above them. Upwards in the social scale the word gets many a new meaning, but the leading idea is still that of pecuniary superiority. In cities the term is considered somewhat fanciful, and is certainly less cared for. The "gent" is not indignant at being so designated, he thinks it short—he does not know *how* short—for gentleman.

In society a man, who was otherwise unexceptional and possessed of all the virtues, would certainly be deprived of this honorable name were he to violate any of the various forms that etiquette has made imperative, and which are regarded as the correct thing. A man of high title may do, however, pretty much as he likes. He certainly may commit an incredible amount of vicious actions without losing this designation. One of the most profligate princes who ever sat on the English throne, was denominated by "society" of that day, the first "gentleman" in Europe. When therefore we hear ourselves or others proclaimed to be "gentlemen," or "no gentlemen," we should consider, before being flattered or annoyed, who says it, and what he or she is likely to mean.

"He a gentleman—oh, dear no," says the rector's wife, "The man's a dissenter."

What is a gentleman? still remains unsolved. Its definition in Johnson's lexicon, "to be a man of birth," satisfies no one, and least of all perhaps the men of birth. The poet, indeed, seems to know most about the matter when he writes how rare it is to hear

"Without abuse
The grand old name of gentleman,
Defamed by every charlatan,
And soiled with all ignoble use."