

Concerning Handles.

THERE is a waiter who seems to think that the proper place for his thumb is the bowl of the spoon he deposits in preparation for your soup. He looks curiously at the unanimity with which the company polish the offending bowls with their table-napkins, but he will repeat his action tomorrow. Every housekeeper knows the fiendish ingenuity that cooks and table-maids manifest in breaking the ears off soup-tureens and vegetable dishes, so that in transit these vessels have the option of slipping between extended palms, or of being borne to their places with inserted thumbs, after the fashion of the waiter and the spoon. Waiter, cook, and table-maid may be estimable people in their way, but their refusal to recognize the important function of handles is a justifiable cause for offence, and some day they will know it to their sorrow. Handles are not to be trifled with.

Mrs. X. gave a reception the other evening, which is said by those who were present to have been a brilliant affair. Sir A. B. was among the guests, and the Bishop of C., the Hon. Justice D., Colonel E., Professor F. and Dr. G., with their respective wives, and, in some cases, daughters. As the worthy husband of Mrs. X. is plain Mr. X., and will never, in human probability, be anything more, his democratic wife brought the masculine visitors of her salon down to the same dead level for the time being, receiving and introducing them without distinction as simple Mistfers. Good-natured Sir A. B. smiled, his lordship winced, the judge and the professor failed to notice the omission, while the colonel and the doctor, equally gifted with hirsute adornments, twirled their moustaches fiercely. In five minutes, scattered through the rooms, they had all forgotten the temporary affront; not so, their wives and daughters. These loyal ladies in quiet but pointed conversation did not spare Mrs. X's title to good breeding. They took their husbands and fathers away early in the evening, and the X. family will sigh for the pleasure of their future society in vain. Such direful results flow from inattention to handles.

In order to anticipate some spider lurking round the corner for his long-expected fly, in other words, a writer destitute of spontaneity of thought who manifests his fancied superiority of intellect by adverse criticism, a saving clause may be inserted, even though it break the continuity of the essay. It is to this effect, that the love of titles and the profuse use of them are not characteristic of the highest culture. The Prince of Wales, on private occasions, likes to be addressed as Sir, and the most distinguished of the French nobility ask nothing higher than *Madame* and *Monsieur*. Half-civilized peoples, such as the Germans, Russians, and Americans, revel in personal handles, from a *Hochfuerstliche Durchlaucht*, to Editor Snipe, Banker Krash, and Lawyer Fogg. These are as vulgar on the one hand as was Mrs. X's conduct on the other. Instances of the kind are sporadic even in Canada. A worthy man, innocent of university education, has been known to interrupt his interlocutor with a frown and the words "Doctor, if you please!" Also, a bumptious dignitary addressed a well-known public man with the explanation, "I see you don't know me, but I am the Honourable Senator Great-head." Even ladies have been known to call themselves Mrs. Judge Smith, Mrs. Professor Brown, and Mrs. Dr. Robinson, to say nothing of Mrs. General Jones. Having headed the spider off, unless he be a German, a Russian, or an American arachnid, the defence of handles may be continued.

The efforts of a lumberman, the parts of whose jack-knife have severed connection, to shave a pipeful of tobacco from a hard plug with the blade alone, enable one to form a faint idea of the toil of the ambitious prehistoric man who first set himself the task of cutting down a tree with a handleless flint axe. What joy must have filled his paleolithic heart when an aboriginal sage, experimenting in levers, suggested a wooden handle wedged into or tied about his implement! Never again could that grateful savage handle his primitive chopper as the waiter does the spoon. So handles went on growing in favour, being applied to axes and hoes, brooms and frying-pans, and all sorts of weapons of war, to reach their climax in the fifteenth Christian century, when the *Lanzknechte* formed their invincible porcupine phalanx with spears, the shafts of which were eighteen feet long. Unfortunately, gunpowder soon played havoc

with the porcupine phalanx, but still, in the matter of leverage, and in that of keeping the objectionable at a safe distance, the handle holds its own. An instance of its use in the latter connection is the long-handled frying-pan, which enables the camp cook to prepare his fish or bacon without frying or rather roasting himself. Next to multiplying the effectiveness of one's impressions by leverage is the pleasure of utilizing an element without suffering from it. These two results in the world's physical and social may be obtained by a judicious use of handles.

A handle is not meant to be a striking implement. True, a sheaf of axe-handles rightly distributed has been known to carry the victory for one party in an election scrimmage, and it is said that broom-handles have done similar duty among the lower orders of the fair sex. But these are not legitimate uses of handles. People have been known to throw china ornaments at a dog, yet no person of sense thinks that china ornaments were made for such a purpose. Handles have for one chief end the increasing of the impression or home-driving of the implement to which they are attached, whether it be a broom over a dusty carpet or an axe-head in a tree-trunk. Of course neither the implement nor the handle will do everything. As the handle is for holding it follows that the holder must have command of what he holds, a fact which most men who have handled a scythe seem to know. It is also true, when we leave the barely physical for the intellectual, the moral, and the social, that all men, whether they carry sticks or not, have in themselves, and are capable of making, handles, and that some of them in certain capacities are handles and nothing more.

Thirty years ago a battle took place in Ontario, which, on our side, could scarcely be called lost, but it certainly was not won as it should have been; and all for the lack of a handle. The enemy had been driven back, several of his companies clean broken, many of his men killed, and, at last, up the Limestone Ridge, towards his column, struggled three companies of the Queen's Own. They were fighting splendidly, but in the eagerness of the pursuit the companies had become separated so that a feeling akin to despairing loneliness came over some of the men. The captains were part of the striking machine and had to stand by their men; they could not go roving over the field after the other companies. But had there been a handle there, major, adjutant, call him what you will, who was not afraid of bullets, and had he massed these three companies only and said: "Boys, go in shoulder to shoulder!" a different tale would have been told. The axe-head was heavy, sharp, and bright, but what can any axe-head do without a handle? Nobody asks a regimental staff officer to fight, but if he be not the handle of a division of his regiment in the hand of his commanding officer, cast him out; he is fit neither for the land nor for the dung-hill. We have got as good rank and file in Canada as there is in the world; we have plucky company officers; but the mounted officers who will risk their lives, galloping along a skirmishing line to close ranks up for a charge are our missing handles, and the sooner the Commander-in-Chief trains these men the better.

Many men besides military men object to being handles. They say "Aut Caesar aut nullus." It is true that handles often get little credit. "That's a clever chopper," says one: "That's a fine sharp axe," says another. They never think of the handle till it splits or breaks, and then they curse it. Many a vain-glorious fool has nevertheless had wisdom vouchsafed him sufficient to appreciate the efficacy of an honest, conscientious, industrious handle in sympathy with the homethrusting power; and often when in his elation of heart he has discarded it, he finds that the axe and he have nothing in common. The world is poor through lack of human handles. The infatuated blockheads whom the handles make grow jealous of them, and grasp the axe as the waiter does the spoon, only to cut their fingers. So it is in politics. Where is an honest handle in Conservative or in Liberal ranks? Certainly not the bolters. Where are our University handles? They all want to be axemen, and some, like good Alexander Mackenzie in the political world, want to make every chip fly off their edge. Even women, who are fitted by natural self-abnegation and tact, to be powerful levers between the mover and the actor, have been boomed by the New Woman fad out of the handle sphere into that of very unskilful axe-women. The subject has been opened: the spider can carry it on.