

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

WHAT IS TACT?

(By Arthur Anderson.)

From a loose and thoughtless use of the word, tact has come to mean many things, and the word is used in various and widely differing connections. But if we analysed our statements we should find that we had applied the word tact, in addition to the real thing, to any of the following—diplomacy, self-seeking, and not infrequently deceit.

In order to prevent confusion of ideas we must have a clear conception of the meaning of tact, and at the outset we must try to draw a line between the true and the false.

The noblest conception is given us by Ruskin when he defines tact as the great "touch faculty" which lies in deep-rooted sympathy with humanity, and which enables a man or woman to enter into another's feelings, to be wise for self-sacrifice and self-restraint, and which helps one to judge between the essential and unimportant.

Tact is more easily recognized than defined, and as Ruskin would have us believe that tact is a virtue peculiar to a woman in a greater degree than to man on account of her instinctive sympathies, which are fostered by her more sheltered life, we will turn to a well-known character in literature for an example of a tactful woman. It was certainly the possession of that faculty which enabled Lucy Manette in "A Tale of Two Cities" to be "all things to all" in her household, even when new ties and affections came into her life. Her father never missed her care in the slightest degree; her child never knew but a perfect mother; her husband never lacked the sympathy of his wife, and withal she could understand and sympathize with that strange but pathetic character Sydney Carton.

An Expression of Perfect Sympathy.

Tact may be exercised in a multitude of ways widely differing from each other. A student failed in an important examination. It was the first failure and the blow to many hopes and ambitions. After the results had been made public his chum came to him and, without a word, took his arm and in silence paced the quadrangle with him until the first bitterness had passed. There was the tact of silence which expressed perfect sympathy with the feelings of the disappointed friend.

No less important is the tact expressed in the "word fitly spoken." How often is this seen in discussions and arguments. A few words from a tactful speaker will change the whole current of a discussion from dangerous to safe channels, and will raise the tone of many a meeting. As in public discussion, so in private conversation.

Then we all know what is meant by "the way to do things." It is the tactful way which accomplishes a pleasant duty without marring it, and which carries out an unpleasant duty with the minimum of unpleasantness. Persons in authority ought to be masters of the art of tactfulness, for there are times when power must be exercised, and then tact is "the velvet glove over the iron hand."

It is, perhaps, not too sweeping a statement to make when we say that the majority of Britons object to being managed, and there is a tendency to lose the reverence for authority, but a tactful

person will manage and rule without unduly parading power, and the end in view will be accomplished without lack of self-respect in those who exercise power or those who are subject to them. "A king who fights his people fights himself," is applicable not only to kings but to all in authority, and if commands can be made requests there is a better chance of things being done smoothly and with an infinite saving of energy and power. In this phase of the exercise of tact "the art is to conceal the art," and in this there is no insincerity as some would affirm; it is merely the gaining of right and justifiable ends by the pleasantest means.

Without tact no career can be successful, for tact helps one to make the best use of one's other gifts. The successful business man must be quick to see and seize an advantage at the right moment, and it will only be his sense of the fitness of things—which is tact—will help him to do this. Lack of this quality has ruined many a career.

Tact and Success.

We all know of clever and brilliant speakers who, by unduly forcing their views on their hearers, have alienated people from them. We know people who never know when to keep quiet; others who never know when to bring out a suggestion or when to supply a want that they are perfectly capable of supplying if they would, and so they remain at the bottom of the ladder of success along with those who, by lack of tactful manners, which so help in making one's way with others, hinder their own progress.

It is in this connection, however, that people assert that the use of tact is pure selfishness. That tact has brought personal benefit to those who exercise it is no argument that it is employed for selfish ends. Courtesy, cheerfulness, kindness, sympathy, right judgment, and all other qualities which are essentially embodied in tact are never exercised with the object of personal benefit in view, or else we must believe that the basis of all effort and action in the world is SELF; and a very sordid world we should live in if that were true.

No! tact, like virtue, is its own reward, and that success does come as a result of tactful behavior is the natural effect of a cause which has a very different result as its main object.

Tact, like content, "is a jewel which no Indian mine can buy," but it may be possessed by the humblest as by the greatest. Its possession marks the true gentleman, and its use makes the world a pleasanter place to live in. By tact the rough roads of the world are smoothed, its unpleasant paths avoided, and its travellers are uplifted by the kindlier feeling which is spread abroad.

An eminent English scientist has just advanced the theory that blushing is an achievement of which every one should be proud. He says it requires brains to blush. Idiots can not blush; neither can animals. He calls attention to the fact that tiny infants do not blush, although they learn to at an early age, just as soon, in fact, as the brain begins to exercise its functions. No individual blushes of his own free will. Neither for its coming or its going is there any exercise of will. It is controlled, he says, solely by the brain, and is a positive sign that there is an active brain there.

THE LIFE OF DR. ROBERTSON.

A book that will be read with great interest far and wide in Canada is "The Life of James Robertson" by Ralph Connor (Chas. W. Gordon), Toronto: The Upper Canada Truce Society. Postpaid, \$1.50 net.

To know James Robertson was to love him, and as no man in Canada was ever as widely known, no man was ever as much beloved.

In our Western country, not only in towns and villages, but far out on the pathless plains, the pioneers of 20 years ago will remember his tall, gaunt figure and austere but kindly face—a face full of Scotch shrewdness and quaint humor. Like Abraham Lincoln, a glance at him showed the Westerner what the Westerner most prizes in a man, "He had plenty of good horse sense."

It seems hard to understand how any single man could accomplish the amount of work that he laid out for himself as his daily portion. Fatiguing railway journeys, frightful drives in winter, exhausting journeys in summer, storm and sunshine. None of these things daunted the Church's gallant soldier. Somewhere every night he held a service and delivered an address. To-day to half a dozen pioneers, farmers, ranchers, lumbermen or miners. After service it was his delight to chat for an hour or two, and the charm of the conversation of a man who had travelled so much and knew so many, was always greatly appreciated. If there were children in the house he was their chum and play fellow. Perhaps at 12 o'clock the family he stopped with, tired out, would retire. Not the indomitable Doctor, though. He would turn up at breakfast fresh and cheery with no signs of weariness, and with a great stack of letters daily ready for the mail, which he had written during "the wee sma' hours."

It was a startling mystery to every one when he slept, or if he ever slept. He seemed to be made of three tempered steel.

It has been said that no man occupies so much space in the world that, when the time comes for him to leave it, his loss makes much of a difference in a few hours. This is in a measure true. But the loss to the world of some men is irreparable. There are many great and able men in the Presbyterian Church to-day, but neither now nor at the time of James Robertson's death could a man be found to fill his place.

When appointed superintendent of the Western Missions he made it his ideal to place a minister everywhere where a few Presbyterians could be gathered together to form the nucleus of a congregation.

In carrying out this ideal he had his own troubles and difficulties. The Presbyterian Church is inclined to be conservative in spirit. The fiery young enthusiast was often doused with cold water by the older representatives of the Church, whose ardor had been chilled by disappointments and courage daunted by difficulties.

Yet such was the man's magnetic personality that he rarely visited the colleges of the East and asked for help in the mission field but he succeeded in filling some of the young men with the wine of his enthusiasm. Many of the leading ministers of the Presbyterian Church in Western Canada to-day came to what he truly considered the land of promise, persuaded and enlisted by his earnestness and eloquence.