

a great deal of trouble to impress on a young child certain quite arbitrary rules of demeanor, which are so constantly reiterated and insisted upon that he gradually takes them as a matter of course, and obeys them automatically for the rest of his life, until it would be utterly impossible for him, arrived at manhood, so to fly in the face of his early training as to tie his table napkin round his neck at a dinner-party, to put his knife into his mouth, or to attack his gravy with a spoon. Why should it not be possible to have a course of second-grade instruction in demeanor, so to speak, which should in its turn be as thoroughly taught as the primary one, as insensibly assimilated and automatically obeyed? But it does not seem to occur to most people that this is necessary. Our usual plan, or rather want of plan, is to furnish the young with some stray, haphazard generalities, and then consider that we have done enough. There are few things more dangerous than the half-truths—necessarily and obviously half-untruths as well—which we thrust into the gaps of our code of conduct in a makeshift fashion, to the exclusion of more complete ordinances. Without a misgiving we proceed to tell young people that “manners maketh man,” or “Good manners proceed from a good heart,” and then expect that they themselves should fill in the details for their own daily guidance. We might as well tell them the formula of the law of gravitation, and then expect them never to tumble down.

And so we let them learn by experience—surely the most tedious and painful form of acquiring knowledge—at their own expense and that of others. We let them fall into one pitfall after another, and scramble out as best they may, scratching themselves and others in the process, and perhaps making enemies of dozens of their fellow-creatures who would otherwise

have been well disposed. We allow them to try by practical experiment whether it is by being pompous, off-hand or patronizing that you can make yourself the most disagreeable, and how long other people will enjoy talking to you if you are looking the while, with ill-concealed inattention, over their shoulder. And yet these are things which it is important to know, these are things which should be deliberately taught, and not left to chance.

It is a platitude to say that, as regards the average mass of human beings, the question of failure or success in life is almost entirely determined by their personality. I am not speaking of those whose transcendent gifts of any kind must inevitably lift them conspicuously above their fellows, even when accompanied by the drag of an unfortunate manner; but of the average mortal, sufficiently well equipped to carry him through successfully, provided that all the other conditions be favorable, and that he be not hindered by quite unnecessary stumbling-blocks that a little trouble and forethought might have removed from his path. An ingenuous investigator put forth, I am told, some time since a circular inquiring into the causes of failure, a copy of which was sent round to all the people who might be supposed to have good reason to know the answer. History does not say what were their feelings on receiving it. But, however plausibly they may have managed to explain why they had not succeeded in doing all they had desired to do, we may surmise that they did not, in nine cases out of ten, put their finger on the real cause—namely, that of having been afflicted with an unlucky manner, or unlucky manners, which had stood persistently in their way. They had taken, no doubt, a very great deal of trouble to learn many things that they thought would be useful to them, but this thing, that matters so very much,