

EQUALITY OF CONSIDERATION

A STUDY OF CHRISTIAN COURTESY

EQUALITY of function and equality of opportunity will make the world no happier or better. But where there is equality of consideration social peace reigns.

In a flower sepal, petal, stamen, anther, root, each has its contribution to make to the life and sweetness of the flower, and each is concerned in the health of the whole. So in the Christian State everybody is to be somebody, but *not* 'nobody to anybody.' Each human being is 'a separate thought of God.'

If a young man is taught to be as attentive to plain and poor girls as to attractive and smart ones, to the governess as much as to the heiress, if he is taught to treat inferior races, when among them, with respect and sympathy,¹ he will be a better man than if he should thrill with the political theories of Harrington, Sidney, Condorcet, or Bright.

The modern child is encouraged by assiduous deference to its ideas and desires to be inconsiderate to others, especially its elders; the schoolboy has a snobbish way of refusing recognition to the claims of 'outsiders' or of social inferiors. Whereas it is by his behaviour and special courtesy to outsiders and inferiors that a gentleman is known. A lady also.

Queen Victoria wrote in one of her letters: 'I was taught to beg my maid's pardon for any naughtiness or rudeness towards her—a feeling I have ever retained.'

The King raises his hat in response to the salutation of the lowliest of his subjects, so acknowledging that

¹ Mill was justly severe on insolence to 'niggers' (*Letters*, i, 4, 21, 130; ii, 187). Lord Morley points out that bad manners, offensive in any country, are in India a crime.

Equality of Consideration

prince and ploughman are of one clay, stamped with one Image and the objects of a common redemption. The following, from the *Story Books of Little Gidding*² is the same thing in a picturesque form.

THE CHEERFULL relates : ' Ingo, King of the Draves, after his conversion to the Christian Faith, making a stately Feast, not, as Ahasuerus, to shew the bounty of his own, but the glorie of Christ's Kingdom, sett all his Nobles, which were at that time Pagans, in his hall below, and certaine poore Christians in his Presence-Chamber with himself, with Kingly Cheare and Attendants. At which they wondering, he told them, This he did, not as King of the Draves, but as King of another world, wherein these were his consorts and fellow-Princes; these he saw with a spiritual eie clad in white robes and worthy his company, as beloved and honoured of God.'

THE MOTHER : ' No Discant can adde grace to the plaine song of this story.'

We read in Caxton that St. Louis, King of France,

Was accustomed every Saturday to wash with his own hands, in a secret place, the feet of certain poor folk, and after dried them with a towel, and kissed much, humbly and semblably, their hands, dealing to each a sum of silver. Also to seven score poor men which came daily to his court, he ministered with his own hands food and drink He even had, both at his dinner and his supper, three ancient poor, which ate at his side; and sometimes of the dishes and meats that our Lord's poor had touched with their hands, for the honour and worship of His name, he had no shame to eat.

Gardiner says of Charles I : 'Over Herbert, Charles exercised that wonderful charm which sprang from his gentleness and the consideration which he exercised

² Many readers will remember the description of the ' Protestant Nunnery,' set up by Nicholas Ferrer in the reign of Charles I, and of its inhabitants and way of living, in J. H. Shorthouse's romance, *John Inglesant*. Nicholas Ferrer was an Anglican deacon, and the friend of George Herbert, the parson-poet of Bemerton.

Blackfriars

towards those who accepted his sway.' Harrington, the ardent republican, was in 1647 forced by the Parliament upon the captive monarch as one of his bed-chamber. Wood says that though they 'often disputed about government, he passionately loved his Majestie,' and chiefly for the extraordinary considerateness which he always showed towards those who waited on him.

Charles II inherited few of his father's virtues, but attracted great affection because, testifies Aubrey³ 'that the age is more refined is much by the example of his gracious Majestie, who is the patterne of courtesie.'

Louis XIV waited on Molière at supper to reprove the courtiers' superciliousness towards the humbly-born player.

Of Isabella the Catholic, Marinaeus records: 'Such was the strict and careful justice measured out to each individual that all men—nobles and knights, traders and husbandmen, rich and poor, masters and servants—were treated alike and received equally their share thereof.' Her tender solicitude for the aborigines of the New World is described in the life of Columbus.

Archbishop Laud (described by Sir Harbottle Grimstone as 'the sty of all the pestilential filth that hath infested the Comonwealth') not only prayed always for his servants, but rose from his bed and took a night journey to comfort the last moments of one of them. 'Make me,' he wrote, 'willing, and in some measure able, to repay unto them the time and strength which they spend to do me service.'⁴ When he was being taken to prison and to death 'hundreds of my poor

³ *Brief Lives*, ii, 241.

⁴ But George Herbert complains of the new-rich of his day that 'they think their servants for their money are as other things that they buy, even as a piece of wood which they may cut or hack or throw into the fire; and soe they pay their wages all is well.' (*The Countrey Parson*).

Equality of Consideration

neighbours stood by my barge and prayed for my safety and return to my house; for which I bless God and them.' 'Rotten, idolatrous heart,' wrote Prynne after 'unkennelling that fox'

Dr. Johnson had little patience with affected sorrows, and was often very rude. But this sturdy subordinationist fetched Hodge's cat's meat himself, to spare the feelings of Negro Frank.

When Dr. Dodd was going to the gallows Johnson did not say he would pray for him, but asked *his* prayers—surely an act of great delicacy. He gave a home to a peevish and ungrateful trio: indeed Mrs. Thrale records that he 'nursed *whole nests* of people in his house, where the lame, the blind, the sick or the sorrowful always found a sure retreat from all the evils whence his little income could secure them. He kept his numerous family in Flect Street upon a settled allowance, but returned to them every Saturday to give them three good dinners and his company before he came back to us on the Monday night, treating them with the same, or perhaps more, ceremonious civility than he would have done as many people of fashion.'

But of the virtuous Whig Gray Mr. Gosse remarks: 'Stoke Poges was not a home for Gray with Mrs. Rogers bedridden and Mrs. Oliffe for its other inmate.'⁵

Scott's house, says Andrew Lang, 'was a great hearth whence radiated light and comfort on the humblest.' 'Sir Walter,' said a cottar, 'speaks to every man as if they were his blood relations.'

It is related of Lady Georgiana Fullerton that she several times took a crossing-sweeper's place that he might hear Mass without losing his halfpence. She might almost have remembered Lamb, who insists that Dorimant must help the apple-woman to pick up

⁵ *Gray*. ('English Men of Letters.')

Blackfriars

her wandering fruit, and tells of a city merchant who ever yielded the wall to an ancient beggar woman.

Milton speaks of :

Honest offered courtesy,
Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds
With smoky rafters than in tapestry halls
And courts of princes, where it first was named.

But it is not usually observed that a working-class employer is kinder than others to those who work for him. Nor yet that most consideration is shown to waiters and servants in continental hotels by citizens of the transatlantic land of equality. One of them complained on a European steamship that money seemed to be of no use there : it was first come, first served. For which God in His mercy may save Europe even yet. Shelley hailed the emergence of

A people mighty in its youth,
Where, though with rudest rites, Freedom and Truth
Are worshipped.

But the American police are stated by observers⁶ to be far rougher than European ones to common folk, while servilely deferential to people of wealth. (Here in England the bullying and oppression of the poor man *because he is poor* is bad enough in all conscience.) Will it be rejoined that there ought to be no need for a policeman to keep back grand carriages to let a little ragged girl cross the road, seeing that in the ideal state there will be no ragged children and no grand carriages? St. Paul ought not to have needed to write that letter of high-minded courtesy to Philemon. In

⁶ *E.g.*, by Count Van de Vaya in *Inner Life of the United States* (1908). He was also struck by the impenetrable barriers which hedge a President, compared with the affable accessibility of the old monarchies, and the personal ties between prince and subject.

Equality of Consideration

a word: considerateness in a perfectly equal world would be superfluous

The Apostle does not set his face against the relation of master and servant, even though it were a bond-servant. But he thus exhorts: 'Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, τὴν ἰσότητα, knowing also that ye have a Master in heaven.' Not *paritas* or *aequalitas*, but *aequitas* is the basis of Christian society. Inequality being inevitable, not to say providential, what is called Feudalism put it on a moral and spiritual basis. All unequal and all helping.

The New Testament considers the purity of a slave-girl as important as that of her mistress. But Voltaire scorned the 'stupid and barbarous' masses, as 'oxen who needed only a goad, the yoke and a bundle of hay.'

A remarkable article appeared in *The Guardian* of March 4th, 1891, entitled 'What Vienna does for the Poor.' It reads like a Utopian romance, this combination of wisdom and foresight with Christian tenderness and personal devotion. 'Vienna,' the writer observed, 'must be a terrible stumbling-block to theorising democrats.' But Lecky repeatedly speaks of Austria as one of the best-governed of countries. The Emperor Joseph II, in the eighteenth century, declared: 'Old-age relief is a right, not a charity.' At the age of sixty every poor person received a third of his or her previous wage; and hospices for worn-out workers were established. After reading this account it was curious to turn to Disraeli's *Sybil*, and to contemplate such principles as those of Morney.

The lot of the Poor Dependent has been the text of many satires, ancient and modern. Such was Lucian's essay on Hired Companions; and Juvenal's fifth Satire refers to this subject. In *Vanity Fair* the

⁷ Col. iv, 1.

Blackfriars

old 'ultra-Liberal and philanthropist' worldling, Miss Crawley, says to Becky Sharp: 'What is birth, my dear? You, my love, have more brains than half the shire. If merit had its reward you ought to be a duchess—no, there ought to be no duchesses at all, but you ought to have no superior, and I consider you, my love, as my equal in every respect; and—will you put some coals on the fire, my dear, and will you pick this dress of mine and alter it?'

Dean Church, in one of his Occasional Papers, says of Ernest Renan that he had been taught 'the old-fashioned French politeness, that beautiful instinct of giving place to others, which is perishing in the democratic scramble for the best places.'

When, after Poitiers, the French King was brought to Edward the Black Prince, the latter would be his esquire, to help him from his armour. But the King said: 'Gramercy, cousin, but it is not for you to serve me. Never did prince win so much honour as you have done in one day.' And Edward grieved much that his honour should be won by another's misfortune.

Equality of consideration—Christian courtesy—must apply also to nationalities. Provinces with their populations are not to be bartered or exchanged like pawns at chess.

And equality of consideration involves equal administration of justice. Rousseau wrote: '*Le premier et le plus grand intérêt public est toujours la justice. Tous veulent que les conditions soient égales pour tous, et la justice n'est que cette égalité.*' Similarly the French Assembly's Declaration of the Rights of Man declared (Art. xvii) that 'civil equality does not mean the equalisation of property or of distinctions, but that all citizens are equally obliged to submit to the law, and are equally entitled to the law's protection.'

Equality of Consideration

But this was the political creed propounded by Charles I on the scaffold : he and Laud had been no respecters of persons, thereby incurring the bitter hatred of the Puritans.

S. F. DARWIN FOX.