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Anna J. Cooper Courtesy

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ANNA J. COOPER

COURTESY

I was attracted recently by some fine Irish moss, growing rather widely and unkept in a show window out Seventh street way. As my own pots of moss had unaccountably lived all winter to die in Wildly and unkept in a show window seemed badly in need of expert thinning out, I determined to stop and barter for a few sprigs here to start a fresh pot. As I entered, I saw the place was a barber shop, with nothing doing for the time being. Two lads of about high school age lounged in the front, one chewing gum, the other "jes looking on." I am sure that they were not conversing. Neither rose as I paused at the door and inquired pleasantly if I could buy a bit of the moss in the window. The boy with the gum, who on the whole seemed less wooden of the two (at least his jaws were alive) jerked his head toward the west without releasing his gum, by which gesture I discovered a third occupant of the room, whom I judged to be the proprietor, enjoying his ease with becoming dignity near a barber chair in the rear of the room.

Now I submit that by all odds, I would have been rated as a prospective customer to be met with the ingratiating bow and smile of the trade.

"Madam, would you like your hair bobbed or your face lifted, or eyebrows plucked, or third chin reduced? We have all styles—satisfaction guaranteed. . . ."

But no; he does not even straighten his backbone from on the highest round of a chair, but waits as woodenly as the two boys had done until I repeat my offer to buy a bit of moss, and then emits, without so much as moving his eyes, the grunted monosyllable, "Naw," with a finality that closes the incident.

I had to indulge in an ironical "~~How delightfully accommodating!~~" as I tried to smile away my chagrin and disappointment on leaving the non-social trio-diasappointment, not on failing to get a sprig of moss, but a sense of failure in our whole scheme of education which, while aiming to adjust the individual to life and its environing requirements, could project such an object life before our young people in practice.

It is either merely a groundless suspicion on my part, or there is more and more a noticeable disregard for the conventions of good manners—those little courtesies in our contacts which ought to pave the way to a happy adjustment in all the little affairs of life and which have most assuredly for the man in business, the foundation stone for all progress and success.

And again, am I wrong in wondering whether the deliberate rudeness I sometimes encounter in our city gives evidence of a widening gulf, a growing separation in sympathy and understanding between our self-styled intelligentsia, and which I may call the "ignorantsia," or between the privileged (if ever so imperfectly) and the underprivileged classes.

Deplorable, if true, such a chasm would be at any time and under any circumstances. The first move to heal the breach should come from those whose opportunities and superior advantages enable them to appreciate the dangers of a house divided against itself, and whose cultivated powers impose the responsibility of sane leadership and sympathetic guidance and instruction.

For after all, our cause is one; our interests one. Together we rise and fall.

Mutual distrust and suspicion will never get us anywhere. Scorn and repulsion beget nothing but hate, jealousy, and vindictiveness. If the masses do not believe in our brand of brotherhood, it may be after all that there is a baser metal mixed in the alloy. Genuine kindness needs no interpreter. It speaks a universal language. The discourtesy of plain people is too often but a reflection of something spurious found in the article that has been offered them.

But whatever the cause, our duty as teachers and leaders is to impress on our youth, along with the subjects and courses offered in the schools, the absolute value and essential bedrock importance of good manners in business and courtesy in every human contact.