

ANNIE CALL

A MAN OF THE
WORLD

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Содержание

I	5
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	8

A Man of the World

I

There are two worlds in the minds of men: the one is artificial, selfish, and personal, the other is real and universal; the one is limited, material, essentially of the earth, the other supposes a kind of larger cosmopolitanism, and has no geographical limits at all; it is as wide as humanity itself, and only bounded by the capacity for experience, insight, and sympathy in the mind and heart of man. A true man of the world, therefore, is not primarily of it, – a true man of the world must know and understand the world; and in order to do so, he should be able at any time to get it into perspective.

Charles Dickens says that by a man who knows the world is too frequently understood "a man who knows all the villains in it." It is of course, by gentlemen, also understood that a man who knows the world knows all its manners and customs, and can adapt himself to them easily and entirely, wherever he may be. But this external polish does not preclude the idea, even among so-called well-bred men, that a man who knows the world knows all the villains in it, and such a man may be more or less of a villain himself, provided he has the cleverness and the ingenuity to hide his villainy. To a certain extent the appearance of virtue has been always more or less of a necessity in the world, but the moral standards in social, professional, and business life are inconsistent and mixed. Even in essentials the highest standards are often modified to suit the preference of the majority. It is not always considered dishonorable for a man to cheat in business, so long as the cheating is done without interfering in any way with the general customs of the business world.

When we say that a man of the world is generally understood to be a man who "knows all the villains in it," it seems at first sight an extreme statement, but as the world goes now, it certainly represents the general tendency of thought. The distinction is too seldom made between a man of the world and a worldly man, – between a man who really knows the world as it is and a man whose familiarity with it is narrow and sordid. When people speak of "seeing life" they seldom mean seeing the best of it.

The same tendency toward perversion, as being the more interesting phase of life, is found among physicians and trained nurses. A good physician once told me, with pained indignation, that his students would go miles to see an abnormal growth of tumor, but not one of them would turn around to enjoy the mechanism of a healthy heart. And it is a well-known fact that many trained nurses will lose interest in a case the moment a patient begins to recover. "A splendid case of typhoid fever" is, not a case in which the patient is throwing off the effects of the germ with wholesome promptness, but one in which the germ is doing its worst, – where the illness is extreme, and the delirium exciting. To be sure, in such a case, there is intense interest in taking all possible means, with promptness and decision, to save the patient's life; but, if this were done only with a keen love of wholesomeness and normal health, the interest of the nurses and physicians would never wane until the patient had become strong and vigorous. If the standard of the best physical health were steadily before the eyes of physician and nurse, and if both had a strong desire to bring the patient, as nearly as possible, up to their own high standard of health, there would be a very great difference in the atmosphere of sick rooms and hospitals. The work of physicians and nurses seems to be more often that of protection against disease than that of achievement of health; and the distinction, though at first sight it may seem a fine one, is nevertheless radical.

Note the parallel between this negative tendency toward health of body, and the same negative tendency in the world toward health of soul. It is protection against the worst ravages of sin which is the moral aim of the majority of the world; not a striving toward a positive standard of healthy life

for both soul and body. What is sin but disease of the soul? Sin is just as truly, just as practically, disease of the soul, as any form of known malady is disease of the body. If we could impress ourselves strongly with the fact that sin is disease, – disorder and abnormality, – it would be a radical step toward freedom from sin. By sin is meant every kind of selfishness, – whatever form it may take.

A young friend, in speaking of a companion charming in his words and manners and most attractive because of his artistic temperament, but evidently loose in his ideas of morality, once expressed the opinion that it was "all right" to associate with this charming man, – enjoying all that was delightful in him and ignoring, so far as possible, all that was evidently bad.

"Could you ignore dirty nails, dirty ears, and a bad smell about your companion?" someone asked.

Whereupon the young man exclaimed, with an expression of supreme disgust, "How can you speak of such things, – of course I could not stay with him for five minutes!"

But he did not in the least associate the loose, light, unclean way of looking at human relations, with the same careless uncleanness as applied to the body. And yet, in reality, the one kind of uncleanness corresponds precisely to the other. In the one case the dirt is on the inside and is what we may call living dirt, because it is kept alive by the soul to which it is allowed to cling. In the other case the dirt is on the outside, and can be washed off with soap and water. Very few so-called men or women of the world are willing to appear dirty and slovenly in their bodies, – but a great many are willing to be dirty and slovenly in their souls. A curious and significant fact it is, that often, when a man's nerves give way, even when his external habits have been most cleanly, or even fastidious, they may change entirely, and he may go about with spotted clothes, dirty hands, and a general slovenly appearance, whereas such external shiftlessness would have been impossible to him while his nerves were comparatively well and strong.

When such a man's nerves give way, so that he loses to some extent the external use of his will, the dirty habits of his mind appear in slovenly and dirty habits of body, because he has no longer the will-power to confine them to his private thoughts and feelings. The habits of his body become then a true expression of his state of mind.

We may prove the relation between sin and disease by tracing what might be called a mild sin to its logical extreme. Just as we may follow almost any disease in its development, until it causes the death of the body, if the body is not protected from its growth, so we may follow any sin in its development to the death of the soul, if the soul is not similarly protected. All sin, when allowed to increase according to its own laws, is the destruction of both soul and body.

Macbeth's mind became diseased; and we may find many an Iago in our insane asylums today, for, with all his cleverness, no Iago can, in the long run, keep control of his mind if his selfish plans are frustrated. The loathsome diseases of the body which are liable to overtake a Don Juan may only be spoken of, or thought of, as a means of removing the blindness of those who, from dwelling upon the sensations of the body, come to think of sin as pleasant. When their blindness is removed, the least touch of the sensuality which causes the disease will fill them with wholesome horror. It is wonderfully provided by the Creator that any sensation, which is selfishly indulged in, any sensation that a man remains in for its own sake, must lead first to satiety, – and then to worse than satiety and death. This is true both of all selfish sensations of the body and of all useless emotions of the mind. Our sensations and our emotions must be obedient servants to a wholesome, vigorous love of usefulness, or they become infernal masters whose rule leads only to weakness and death.

The old asceticism, – the spiritual stupidity of primitive times, – placed the world, the flesh, and the devil on a level of equality, whereas both the world and the flesh are capable of noble uses, but the devil is not. The world and the flesh are servants, and good servants; they are necessary instruments for the carrying out of the Divine purpose in human life. But the devil is merely the perversion of good things to useless, trivial, and degrading ends. He has no power in himself except as we give him power, and we give him power every day when we associate the idea of the world with that of the

villains in it, and when we debase the flesh by not realizing the clean, good service for which it is intended. Indeed, we are really feeding the devil in so far as our standards of life are negative, and not positive, – in so far as we are only busy in protecting ourselves from worse sin or from worse disease, instead of casting out *all sin and disease*

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