

THE GENTLEMAN

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The Gentleman by George H. Calvert

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GEORGE H. CALVERT

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By GEORGE H. CALVERT



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THE GENTLEMAN.



I.

INTRODUCTORY — ETYMOLOGICAL — PRELIMINARY.

THE word gentleman recurs four hundred and fifty-two times in Shakspeare,—an iteration which proves broad acknowledgment in that day of the thing signified. For every ten utterances, through type or speech, of this magnetic word in the sixteenth century, there are ten thousand in the nineteenth. During these three centuries, it has spread over new continents, with the prolific expansive British race, its growth outstripping a hundred-fold even that of population. Whoso should happen to pass through the Five Points in New York, or the Seven Dials in London, at the moment of an auction, would hear the watchful orator of the

assemblage offer the appellative, "gentlemen," to his ragged auditors, not more glibly than by them it would be accepted.

Let no bedressed, bescented passer curl his lip at this impudent theft of an epithet claimed as property of his favored few. On the part of the auctioneer there is no theft: on the part of the scornful passer there may be usurpation. The auctioneer necessarily, unconsciously, speaks under sway of the advanced sentiment, which recognizes that within every Christian heart live the germs of that high Ideal, the manifestation of which in moving, incorporate reality receives the choice name of *gentleman*. The universal giving and accepting of this name is a homage to the beauty of what the name represents,—an aspiration, however remote and modest, for the possession of the refined substance.

Among the passages in old English authors, cited by Richardson, to illustrate his definition of gentleman, is the following from Spenser's *View of the State of Ireland*:—"If he can derive himself from any sept, (as most of

them can, they are so expert by their bardes,) then he holdeth himself a gentleman, and therefore scorneth to worke, or use any harde labour, which, he saith, is the life of a peasant or churle ; but thenceforth becometh either an horseboy or a stocah (attendant) to some kerne, inuring himself to his weapon, and to the gentlemanly trade of stealing,—as they count it.” A little scrutiny discovers in this sentence more than meets the eye, matter apt to our purpose.

In the first place, the need of derivation from a sept or clan, as the foundation of gentlemanhood, wafts us up to the far etymological nest of a brood of well-plumed vocables, namely, to the Latin word *gens*, which primitively meant stem, stock, being more comprehensive than *familia*, family. Thus the *gens Cornelia* embraced several great families, those of the Scipios, the Lentuli, and others. To belong to a *gens* was a high distinction, an ennoblement. So Horace calls *ignobilis*, one who could claim no affinity with these stocks, *homo sine gente*, a man without stem. So significant of rank did the word *gens* become, that not