THE PRICE WOMEN PAY

She Was Greeting a Long Line of Ghostly Guests

BY A SOCIAL PROMOTER

UNTIL within a few years the problem of getting into Society, which became all important the moment the newly arrived American had acquired his fortune, was left for its solution to the women of the household. The man furnished the money and then went into semi-retirement, to be produced only when convention demanded his appearance under his own vine and fig tree. Otherwise, if yet in readiness, he was supposed to be downtown, vaguely somewhere, or at his club, or at any place except his home. Now and then a man with remarkable social talents would appear on the horizon and accomplish great things; but as a rule it was the women who conducted the campaign. But this was when the campaign was not so complex a matter as it is at present, and when Society itself was much smaller.

I do not wish to be ungallant. My best and warmest friends and my most valuable allies in my career as a social promoter have been women. I do not know what I could have done without them. But when left to engineer such an important proposition without the assistance of calm, cool, and collected masculine judgment, they have much more frequently come to disaster than they have achieved success. At heart nearly all women are born gamblers, and they take desperate chances.

Mr. McAllister remarked that if he had charged a fee for every consultation with anxious mothers who wanted to know the proper way of introducing a daughter into New York Society, or with other women who desired to be launched into the social sea and to be able to stay afloat afterward, he would have been a rich man.

I may say in a way that this has also been my experience. I have always gone to the assistance of the fair sex in distress, and it has been my dearest aim to do what I could to help them. Although *sub rosa*, if you will, it has been generally known that I would take a campaign in hand, and that I looked upon such undertaking in the light of a business proposition, yet my only reward in many of these cases has been a smile, or a message of gratitude, or the knowledge that I had added another new friend to my list. And this was sufficient. And so also I have been for sometime not only as one to be called in for consulting, but also as a diagnostician. Today there are in the medical world famous physicians whose practice is confined to these lines, and whose fees are very large, even although they are called in only shortly before the clergyman comes, the copper tank of oxygen is at the front door, the blinds are drawn down, and certain silent, mysterious visitors are admitted to the house.

TWO instances of the results of these consultations I recall vividly. Both of my consulters—I had almost said clients, rather than patients—were women eager to get into Society, and each of them had made serious mistakes; almost, in one instance, unpardonable blunders. Both sought my advice and guidance. One followed my instructions—and this, in a way, was the more hopeless of the two—and arrived. But the other was headstrong and insisted upon obeying her own impulses, and notwithstanding all that I could do for her, and also much that others tried in the way of putting her right, was a failure.

They were friends, and were from the West. I do not want to get in the rut of the average society novelist, to whom this is a stock situation and one of the most time-worn props in the business. But I have no doubt—as all this happened more than a dozen years ago—that bits of this history have become more or less public property and that it serves as a type. It is needless to say that each in her way was delightful, was charming and exceptionally clever. These are stock adjectives also; but in dealing with these Society matters one must keep within the traditions and use the vocabulary, even if it be limited.

I shall call one the Lady from Kansas. The other I might christen the Lady from Missouri; but she was of a silly sort, and her own name of Mollie suits her better. I met the Lady from Kansas on an ocean steamer. It was before the days of large expensive hotel ships, Marconi messages, and matrons, and there were possibilities of scraping acquaintances and meeting agreeable people on the smaller vessels of that time. In fact, some social aspirants had found this not an impossible way of gaining a foothold in Society, as in mutually fleeing from boredom we become more or less akin. It is true that frequently these ocean-crossing intimacies took the form of ships that pass in the night, and were forgotten the moment one landed on terra firma. But there was always a chance, if your game was well played.

It had been fearfully rough, I remember, for several days, and at the Captain's table there were left only two brave passengers, the other an attractive looking woman, just a little passed the meridian, a bit demure in manner, but with a sparkle in her dark eyes—which, by the way, she used most effectively. Naturally we became chatty and, meeting as we did at every meal, quite good friends en passant. Awaiting her in New York was a husband. As I afterward learned, the Lady had made several matrimonial ventures, but all of her partners, except naturally this last, were respectably laid away under the sod. There were also daughters who were being educated at a convent in France.

What attracted me to the lady of the table was her voice, which was clear and sweet and cultivated, and she had also the compelling intonation. I was therefore all the more surprised to know that she was from Kansas, because I had some absurd idea at the time that everyone in the West use the hard R. She was slightly pedantic, and now and then rather bored one with a repeated use of apt but stilted expressions. She also talked literature and art a trifle too much, and she seemed to know too many artists and social people in New York. At that time there was only one novelist, Edgar Fawcett, who belonged to the Union Club, and the embarrassment of his talents was rather resented by the members. But I knew that the Lady from Kansas had Continental ideas, and had seen something of society where it had become broader in its centuries of existence.

One afternoon she turned the conversation to the subject of Society in New York, and her comments