

TURNING THE TABLE

By VIRGINIA LEILA WENTZ

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In the beginning Greta had dreamed of romantic love and army or navy officers. That was while her father lived. When he died, falling to leave either her mother or her a red copper—nothing but the big mansion with the enormous mortgage on it—Greta, prompted by her mother, was ready to marry anything eligible, provided there was a good, substantial bank account.

As far as his physical appearance went John Selwyn did fairly well. He was deep chested and broad shouldered and a bit above medium height. His chin was firm, his mouth was sensitive and his eyes were dark and quiet. In big, practical things, in the financial world, in mines and stock markets he was at home. In the arena of more circumscribed things—society with a capital S and the infinite trifles that make up form and manners in that arena—he humbly acknowledged that he was out of place.

As for Greta Weston—well, the young creature whom God permitted him to call wife was to John a being from a world he had never known. She was rather a pretty girl and cultured, but to him she was fairer than lilies, sweeter than roses, more precious than all rare gems. Her lovely, delicate face was to him the face of an angel, and his love for her was a mute idolatry. In all his life, not even on the dear old New England farm, had he known anything like it.

When John paid off the mortgage and settled a princely few hundred thousands on Greta, Mrs. Weston saw no reason why the patrician feelings of herself and daughter should longer be repressed.

"If I may make a suggestion," she remarked haughtily one morning at breakfast, the morning following a dinner at which John's ignorance of table etiquette had marked him as an unspeakable kind of skinned milk among the social cream, "when you have finished a course it is customary to lay your knife and fork on your plate side by side."

"So sorry. But you see I'm not much used"—began John humbly.

"Oh, we know," observed Mrs. Weston icily, "but we'll do what we can to polish you, at least to save you from being ridiculous." And then, with his permission, she began to point out to him his remissnesses of the night before. For example, it appeared that he had offered the wrong arm to the lady whom he took in to dinner; he had shaken hands when he should nod and failed to shake when he should; he hadn't taken the right seat in the carriage; he hadn't risen when the ladies sat at the table. In fact, he had been a bull in the china shop from beginning to last.

"Give me a little time, dear," he said to Greta a trifle sadly, completely ignoring her mother—"just a little time—and I'll promise you won't be ashamed of me."

If during this scene the man appeared undignified and weak it must be remembered that he was idolatrously in love with his wife. But that very idolatry helped him in other ways, for love is a famous school mistress. He had mastered big, practical problems in life, and he was quite confident that he could conquer these smaller ones.

Pathetically enough, however, his rapid daily improvement passed all unnoticed in the eyes of his young wife. She grew prettier and prettier, her cheeks more exquisitely pink, her eyes brighter. But likewise she grew more and more capricious and manifested increased annoyance at his presence. At first he wondered helplessly. Little by little the scales began to fall from his eyes.

There was a copy of Siebel's "Madonna and Child" which hung directly over the hall mantel. John had bought the picture because he fancied the Madonna resembled Greta. One evening, following his wife into dinner, the fancied likeness struck him with renewed force—she was so richly colored and beautiful! Absentmindedly he stepped on her train and ripped the waist seam ever so slightly. She turned on him contemptuously when he apologized, with an anger born of her condition:

"Do you mean to keep on 'begging pardon' all your life?"

"It was a little accident, dear. I wouldn't get angry," he remonstrated soothingly, at heart very sorry and very much annoyed at himself.

"Don't call me 'my dear'!" she flashed back. "I despise you! I might as well tell you first as last! I!"

"Greta, Greta!" cried Mrs. Weston warningly. But Greta, for the first time in her life, was beyond the control of expediency.

"I can't bear you! I never, never, never loved you, and now—I can't even breathe where you are! Oh, if I could never see you again, if I could never see you again!" She began to cry and sob violently, and her mother led her upstairs.

When Mrs. Weston came down a half hour later the dinner table, brilliantly lighted, gleaming with damask and silver, was still untouched. John, who sat bowed in surprise and crushed grief, slowly raised his head. There was a pause. The thought that occurred to Mrs. Weston was that he was sitting while she was standing—a distinct violation of etiquette. As for him—well, he was thinking of other things. Bewilderedly, he brushed away a heavy lock that had fallen over his forehead.

"She said"—he stopped, his voice was

husky—"she said she'd never cared for me." He swallowed hard again. "Never—is that true?"

The woman was frightened. She felt the sudden iron of his will and was speechless.

"Answer me. Is it?" His command rang out like a pistol shot, and a dangerous gleam lay level in his eyes.

"Yes," she admitted, utterly thrown off her guard.

"At least," he said finally, and his voice sounded miles and miles away, "we have the truth at last. Now we may understand each other."

From that time on Greta was as completely ignored as if she had been the bisque shepherdess on the drawing room cabinet. From being everything in the house she and her mother had suddenly become nothing. It was almost as if they were remaining there like the maids on two weeks' notice.

One morning they told him that his wife was calling for him. They led him into a cool, dim room. When he became accustomed to the half light he saw that Greta, the pink rose, had turned to an exquisite white lily. He spoke to her gently, considerately, as the physician had bade him, but as to feeling—had not she herself killed it?

But all the dammed up love in the man's nature went immediately out to the human trifle in blue ribbons and lace which the nurse held on a pillow for his inspection.

John's son and heir grew and thrived daily. Life for the first time since his marriage again became invested with a meaning for John, and God existed after all! The father directed his household with the power and the superior indifference of a king, and the women folk were treated almost as ciphers. Mr. John Selwyn, a man of affairs to be reckoned with, well dressed, well mannered, polished in speech, went to his offices every morning. In the afternoons he drove out with his son and his son's nurse in his son's landau behind his son's magnificent horses.

From the moment of her child's birth Greta had felt a tenderness toward John—the tenderness of a wife who has borne a man a son. Now she was beginning to feel other things. She smiled as she remembered her irritation at his social derelictions, his old time lack of etiquette which had seemed to her a hopeless stumbling block in the way of mutual happiness. But now—even if he hadn't mastered those deficiencies, which obviously he had—what were such small matters compared with the power to face the realities of existence? And how big he was in all big things!

One day she came to him, a dumb, pathetic question in each purple eye.

"What is it?" he asked generously. Her short upper lip trembled, and without warning she burst into tears.

"I—I want you to love me again," she sobbed.

"Love you? As the woman who bears my name, as the mother of my son—why, I could scarcely help but do that."

"No, no!" she cried, as one who really suffers. "I don't mean that way. I want you to love me as you used to. I'm just longing to have you come and kiss me—when you don't have to, you know."

He stood precisely where he was, gauging the sobbing little figure for a long, long while in utter silence. First he measured her severely, then questioningly. Last of all, a sudden softness stole over him and swept him off his feet.

Without a word, but with eyes that were wet, he crossed the room and took her protectingly in his big arms. Just then the nurse fetched their small son in, crowing with delight.

A Ministerial Doubt.

The new pastor of the country church was an eminently practical man as well as a good Christian, and on the occasion of his first sermon he proceeded at its close to test the practical Christianity of his hearers.

"I should like to know," he said, glancing over the congregation, "how many women in this assembly have not spoken a harsh word to their husbands during the past four weeks?"

There was a stir among the auditors, but no other indication that the shot had told.

"Indeed," he went on, "I am so anxious to know that I shall ask that all the women who have not done so rise to their feet and be counted."

He paused a moment and waited. One rose far over in the corner, then another near her, and soon they had come up all over the house until there were at least fifty on the floor. The preacher counted them carefully. Then he added:

"Fifty-two," he said. "Well, really, dear friends, I had no idea there were so many widows in this community."—London Tit-Bits.

A Deadening Habit.

A fault finding, criticising habit is fatal to all excellence. Nothing will stifle growth quicker than a tendency to hunt for flaws, to rejoice in the unlovely, like a hog which always has his nose in the mud and rarely looks up. The direction in which we look indicates the life aim, and people who are always looking for something to criticize, for the crooked and the ugly, who are always suspicious, who invariably look at the worst side of others, are but giving the world a picture of themselves.

This disposition to see the worst instead of the best grows on one very rapidly until it ultimately strangles all that is beautiful and crushes out all that is good in himself. No matter how many times your confidence has been betrayed, do not allow yourself to sour, do not lose your faith in people. The bad are the exceptions. Most people are honest and true and mean to do what is right.—O. S. Marden in Success Magazine.

SALUTING A SNEEZER

A CUSTOM THAT BELONGS TO EVERY NATION AND CLIME.

There Are Many and Varied Answers to the Question, Why Do We Do It? That Was Asked by Pliny Some Nineteen Centuries Ago.

"Why do we salute the sneezer?" asked Pliny nineteen centuries ago. We still ask the question, and one wonders if Pliny could collect so many ingenious replies as the ana of the twentieth century furnish.

In Caxton's 1483 edition of "The Golden Legende" is an account of a pestilence in Rome in the time of Gregory the Great, from which many died suddenly. "In this manere, sometyme sneesying they deyed, so that when any persone was herd sneesying, anone they that were by said to hym, God helpe you, or Cryst helpe, and yet endureth the custome." As Pope Gregory reigned in the sixth century Pliny's query far antedates the explanation in "The Golden Legende."

In the Buddhist Scriptures, dating at least 250 B. C., it is related that Buddha, when preaching one day to his disciples, sneezed, whereupon all exclaimed: "May the Blessed Lord live! May the welcome one live!" thus seriously interrupting the discourse. Buddha said, "Tell me, when a person sneezes, if the bystanders say, 'May you live,' will he live the longer or die the sooner for it?" "Certainly not, lord." So he forbade them to say it. But the people took offense because the priests did not thus salute them, and Buddha revoked his command.

The Talmudic tradition is that the custom dates from Jacob. Before his time man did not die of disease, but when his appointed time was come he sneezed once and was dead. Jacob petitioned for exemption from this law, and his prayer was granted on condition that among all nations a sneeze should be hallowed by the words, "God bless you."

The Greeks traced the custom back to the myth of Prometheus, who made an image of clay and wished to give it life. From the sun he stole a reedful of rays, and, hastening back to his statue, he placed the reed under its nostrils, producing a sneeze—a phenomenon we may at any time produce by standing in the sun. At this sign of life in his creation Prometheus ejaculated a blessing and a prayer for its preservation, and this response to a sneeze has been handed down through all generations.

Also in the story of the Shunamite child restored to life by the prophet Elisha do we find the idea that this convulsive effort of nature is the first sign of life. "The child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes." According to Scottish folklore, a newborn child is under the fairy spells until it sneezes. Aristotle mentions the practice of physicians who, when death seems near, give medicines to induce sneezing, hoping thereby to arouse the failing faculties. Aristotle seems to have given much attention to omens of sneezing. He says a sneeze on the right hand brings good fortune; on the left hand it betokens ill.

In the Odyssey, when Penelope calls on the absent Ulysses to punish wrong: Telemachus then sneezed aloud. The smiling queen the happy omen blessed.

"So may these impious fail by fate oppressed."

St. Augustine records that when the ancients arose in the morning if they sneezed while putting on their shoes they immediately went back to bed again in order to get up more auspiciously and so escape misfortunes likely to occur during the day. If a Hindoo sneezes while performing his morning ablutions in the Ganges he touches his forehead, nose, chin and cheeks with the tips of his fingers and recommences his prayers from the very beginning. In illness sneezing is considered a good omen, a sign of returning health. Howell in 1639 said, "He that hath sneezed twice, turn him out of the hospital." Among the ancients if any one sneezed directly after dinner a dish was brought back and tasted to avert misfortune.

The custom of saluting belongs to every nation and clime. In Ethiopia when the king sneezed those about him saluted so loudly that they were heard and echoed through the whole city. In 1542 De Soto had an interview in Florida with a cacique who during conversation happened to sneeze. All his attendants bowed their heads, opened and closed their arms and saluted the prince with "May the sun guard you, shine on you, defend you, prosper you," and similar phrases. An Italian child's primer of 1553 says, "Being prompt in saluting any one who may sneeze and returning thanks to any who on such an occasion may have wished you well."

An epigram in the Greek anthology shows it was customary to say "God bless you." The ancient Romans said "Salve." The modern Roman of the lower class says, "Figli maschi!" (May you have male children). The north Germans say, "Your good health." In Vienna, "God be with you." In Ireland the peasant says, "God bless your honor." "Long life to your honor." The Russian form is "To your good health" or "How do you do?" English folklore is full of rhymes about sneezing on certain days. In Devonshire they say: Sneeze on Sunday morning fasting, You'll enjoy your own true love everlasting.

This is but one of the many that are in use all over the land.

Fitting.

Miss Kairless—You've seen that best dress of mine. Now, I want to get a hat to go with it. What would you suggest? Miss Sharp—Why not get a snood?—Philadelphia Press.

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