

OF BLADES AND BLADERY

The Blade is not so much a culture as a temperament, and Bladery--if the thing may have the name--a code of sentiments rather than a ritual. It is the rococo school of behaviour, the flamboyant gentleman, the gargoyle life. The Blade is the tribute innocence pays to vice. He may look like a devil and belong to a church. And the clothing of the Blade, being symbolical, is a very important part of him. It must show not only a certain tastiness, but also decision in the accent, courage in the pattern, and a Dudley Hardihood of outline. A Blade must needs take the colour of his social standing, but all Blades have the same essential qualities. And all Blades have this quality, that they despise and contemn other Blades from the top downward. (But where the bottommost Blade comes no man can tell.)

A well-bred Blade--though he be a duke--tends to wear his hat tilted a little over the right eyebrow, and a piece of hair is pulled coquettishly down just below the brim. His collar is high, and a very large bow is worn slightly askew. This may be either cream-coloured or deep blue, with spots of white, or it may be red, or buff, but not green, because of badinage. The Blade of the middle class displays a fine gold watch-chain, and his jacket and vest may be of a rough black cloth or blue serge. The trousering may be of a suit with the jacket, or tasteful, and the shoes must be long. The betting man, adorned, is a perfect Blade. There is often a large and ornamental stick, which is

invariably carried head downwards. And note, that the born Blade instinctively avoids any narrowness of pose. In walking he thrusts out his shoulders, elbows, and knees, and it is rather the thing to dominate a sphere of influence beyond this by swinging his stick. At first the beginner will find this weapon a little apt to slip from the hand and cause inconvenience to the general public; but he must not mind that. After a few such misadventures he will acquire dexterity.

All Blades smoke--publicly at least. To smoke a white meerschaum in the streets, however, is very inferior form. The proper smoking is a briar, and, remember, it is not smart to have a new pipe. So soon as he buys it, the Blade takes his pipe home, puts it on a glowing fire to burn the rim, scrapes this away, burns it again, and so on until it looks a sullen desperado of a pipe--a pipe with a wild past. Sometimes he cannot smoke a pipe. In this case he may--for his stomach's sake--smoke a cigarette. And, besides, there is something cynical about a cigarette. For the very young Blade there are certain makes of cigarette that burn well--they are mixed with nitre--and these may be smoked by holding them in the left hand and idly swinging them to and fro in the air. If it were not for the public want of charity, I would recommend a well-known brand. A Blade may always escape a cigar by feigning a fastidious taste. "None of your Cabanas" is rather good style.

The Blade, it must be understood--especially by the Blade's friends--spends his time in a whirl of dissipation. That is the symbolism of the emphatic obliquity of the costume. First, he drinks.

The Blade at Harrow, according to a reliable authority, drinks cherry brandy and even champagne; other Blades consume whisky-and-soda; the less costly kind of Blade does it on beer. And here the beginner is often at a loss. Let us say he has looked up the street and down, ascertained that there are no aunts in the air, and then plunged into his first public-house. How shall he ask for his liquor? "I will take a glass of ale, if you please, Miss," seems tame for a Blade. It may be useful to know a more suitable formula. Just at present, we may assure the Blade neophyte, it is all the rage to ask for "Two of swipes, ducky." Go in boldly, bang down your money as loudly as possible, and shout that out at the top of your voice. If it is a barman, though, you had better not say "ducky." The slang will, we can assure him, prove extremely effective.

Then the Blade gambles; but over the gambling of the Blade it is well to draw a veil--a partially translucent and coquettish veil, through which we can see the thing dimly, and enhanced in its enormity. You must patronise the Turf, of course, and have money on horses, or you are no Blade at all, but a mere stick. The Harrow Blade has his book on all the big races in the calendar; and the great and noble game of Nap--are not Blades its worshippers wherever the sun shines and a pack of cards is obtainable? Baccarat, too. Many a glorious Blade has lost his whole term's pocket-money at a single sitting at that noble game. And the conversation of the Blade must always be brilliant in the extreme, like the flashing of steel in the sunlight. It is usually cynical and worldly, sometimes horrible enough to make a governess shudder, but

always epigrammatic. Epigrams and neat comparisons are much easier to make than is vulgarly supposed. "Schoolmasters hang about the crops of knowledge like dead crows about a field, examples and warnings to greedy souls." "Marriage is the beginning of philosophy, and the end is, 'Do not marry.'" "All women are constant, but some discover mistakes." "One is generally repentant when one is found out, and remorseful when one can't do it again." A little practice, and this kind of thing may be ground out almost without thinking. Occasionally, in your conversation with ladies, you may let an oath slip. (Better not let your aunt hear you.) Apologise humbly at once, of course. But it will give them a glimpse of the lurid splendour of your private life.

And that brings us to the central thing of the Blade's life, the eternal Feminine! Pity them, be a little sorry for them--the poor souls cannot be Blades. They must e'en sit and palpitate while the Blade flashes. The accomplished Blade goes through life looking unspeakable wickedness at everything feminine he meets, old and young, rich and poor, one with another. He reeks with intrigue. Every Blade has his secrets and mysteries in this matter--remorse even for crimes. You do not know all that his handsome face may hide. Even he does not know. He may have sat on piers and talked to shop-girls, kissed housemaids, taken barmaids to music halls, conversed with painted wickedness in public places--nothing is too much for him. And oh! the reckless protestations of love he has made, the broken promises, the broken hearts! Yet men must be Blades, though women may weep; and every Blade must take his barmaid to a music hall at least once, even if she be taller than himself. Until then his

manhood is not assured.

Just one hint in conclusion. A Blade who collects stamps, or keeps tame rabbits, or eats sweets, oranges, or apples in the streets, or calls names publicly after his friends, is no Blade at all, but a boy still.

So, with our blessing, he swaggers on his way and is gone. A Don Juan as fresh as spring, a rosebud desperado. May he never come upon just cause for repentance!