

ARTICLE FROM THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE

Ten Ways to Test the Fineness of a Man by Dr. Frank Crane

When it comes to superiority—most of us are mixed. Someone once asked Peter Cartwright if he was "entirely sanctified," after a moment's reflection the old pioneer preacher replied, "I think I am—in streaks."

Most of us are superior in streaks, and doubtless find ourselves inferior and common in many respects. But at least it may help us to know what real superiority is, to know the goal, to know some sort of yardstick by which to measure ourselves.

Some people are better than others. All men are not equal. Some are finer, higher, better bred, nobler than others.

The world has always believed it. And what mankind has believed for a thousand years, what it keeps on believing, generation after generation, must have some truth in it. Pure lies cannot live long; they must be well salted with truth to persist.

We have always had our aristocracies. Caste is ingrained in human thought. The superiority of the few is an ineradicable instinct. Even Jesus said, "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way . . . and few there be that find it."

The Japanese their Levites, the Japanese their Samurai, the Romans their Patricians, the Egyptians their Hierarchy, feudal Europe its Lords and Dukes, the English their Nobility, the Germans their Junkers, India her strict Castes, all nations their Royal Families and High-born Magnificences, and every savage tribe its Chieftains.

Of course many of these splendid ones were frauds. They were great in name and place only. Really they were common as mud. Coarse and bestial natures have often borne the ermine and sat on thrones.

But where there is so much smoke there must be some fire. There could not be so much seeming without a modicum of reality. Counterfeiting cannot go on perpetually unless there exist good money to counterfeit.

So there is a difference in folks, as in cattle. Some are thoroughbred and some are scrubs. In the forest of humanity some trees are tallest. In art some are masters and some imitators. In business some are leaders and some followers. In every war a few become pre-eminent. In society there is an upper ten. In your village there are prominent citizens. In your club, lodge, church, group, circle of acquaintances, workshop or counting house, there are Superior People. They are marked. They stand out from the common mass.

What is real superiority? It consists not in the place you occupy (your official status or your family), the money you have, the clothes you wear, nor any such thing. This is so self-evident it need not be argued.

Neither does it consist in your genius, or talents. A person may be a famous singer, yet a cheap scoundrel; or a world-famous painter or sculptor, yet a cad; a renowned actress, yet no better than a common street walker; a senator or governor or king or nabob, yet of the same fabric and weave as the pothouse loafer.

Neither does it depend on what you say or do. For there are those who talk or write as an angel and perform dazzling deeds, and yet are thoroughly vulgar.

What is the gist of the matter, then? Whether you are superior or not depends on just one thing. It can be tested by just one question: "What do you like?"

Whether one man or woman is superior to another or not is wholly a matter of tastes. If you like certain things, as A, B, and C, you are of the Elect; if you like certain other things, as X, Y, and Z, you are Common.

It's quite usual for us to regard our likes and dislikes as things over which we have no control. We suppose them to be as the color of our hair. If that is your creed, if you look upon your likes as inalterable, why, make up your mind to remain common, go back to your kennel, and be as comfortable as you can. Superiority is not for you. And perhaps it is just as well.

But if in you is the unquenchable ambition, the undentable urge, that drives the hundredth man up to distinction, then listen, and I will show you the Path. That path is—

1. You must realize the need of changing your tastes.
2. You must want to change them, and
3. You must go about it intelligently and with determined will.

And now let us see the goal toward which we must strive. Wherein consists superiority? Who are the genuine Upper Ten? What kind of person is the hundredth man?

You may know the Superior One by these marks:

I. He is spiritual. I use the word carefully. I do not mean he is saintly or poetic or disdains to work with his hands.

What I mean is that his pleasures are more of the mind or spirit than of the body. Joubert says something to the effect that the end of all art and culture is to transfer one's pleasures over from the body to the mind.

The art of living consists in the wise choice of satisfactions. If we choose the fleshly, they do not last; we are eventually bored and wretched. If we choose the higher, they reveal themselves as more permanent, growing by what they feed on. So it is a question of whether you want to be happy a little while or all the time.

The mind and conscience are the latest products of evolution. The body runs back to the beasts. If your joys are in the mind, you can say, in the language of a modern philosopher, "We have a degree of existence at least ten times larger than others; in other words, we exist ten times as much."

Test yourself, then. What do you like best? Beer and beef and sleep, and slippers and dancing and the chase? Does it most irritate you to be deprived of these things? Do you get petulant when you cannot have luxury, fine clothes, prominence, and all such? Well, all the world is like that. Not necessarily wicked—but just Common. The hope is that you are dissatisfied with yourself.

But do you like—like, mark you, not say you like—do you like Mona Lisa or Chopin's Ballade or Walter Pater's writing or prayer or a new idea or a beautiful woodland, so much that you would miss a meal or forego being introduced to an ambassador, for the sake of enjoying them? Then rejoice! For you tread a narrow way, and few there be that find it. You may be many things reprehensible, but you are not Common.

II. Simplicity: The superior ones like simplicity. The vulgar crowd likes finery. Which makes you happier, to look at a clean, naked Greek pillar or at the gilded gingerbread carving in a New York theatre or a Paris hotel?

Do you love fine clothes, new and expensive hats, shoes that cost twenty-five dollars, jewelry and perfumes? These tastes may not be evil, I do not say they are; but every harlot has them.

A great soul could not possibly live in a marble palace, and have more cooks, butlers, chauffeurs and serving maids than fingers and toes. It would suffocate him.

The more real culture a woman has the less she fancies fine feathers. She abhors any hat or gown that renders her conspicuous.

The superior use simple words. They have simple habits. They eat simple food. They find pleasure in simple forms of play.

If you take to loud neckties and long words and affected manners and expensive dinners, and luxury of all kinds, you are not alone—every servant girl and stable boy in Christendom shares your tastes, though perhaps not your ability to gratify them, and you are Common.

Socrates, Buddha, and Jesus are, by the common consent of mankind, superior. We cannot all be of so great grandeur of spirit. But we can like what they liked—simplicity of life, of thought, and of desire. And if not, why, we are of the "ignoble vulgar."

III. Service: The superior ones like to serve. The common crowd love to be served. It's the cheap soul that loves to be waited on. The lady who must ring for her maid to cross the room and bring her her wrap, the gentleman whose soul swells when the man-servant hands him his hat and cane, are not singular, the common herd all like that, they are ordinary, you might say "or'nary."

Just any common boor enjoys having his feet washed; the Son of God washed His disciples' feet.

It is the instinct of service, this innate joy of doing something to make other people happy, that is the core of politeness, of what we call good breeding. It is evidenced in

little things, such as yielding your seat to a lady in the street car, picking up and comforting the child that has stumbled, listening courteously while another is speaking, and the whole air of deference and respect that marks the gentleman.

Grabbing all you can, looking out for Number One, "gittin' aplenty while you're gittin' it," blowing your own horn, pushing yourself forward, shoving yourself in the best seat—all such things may be commendable enough, if you like them, only they are of the broad and wide way, and many there be that go therein.

IV. The superior person is above his pleasures: He has pleasures as everyone has. He loves to eat, and distinguishes between a well-cooked steak and a sloppy stew; he loves to drink, and appreciates the fine flavors of good milk and excellent coffee; he enjoys playing tennis, and motoring, and the theatre and music and art. But the point is that, no matter how keen his delight in any of these human joys, none of them is bigger than he is.

He uses them! They do not lead him by the nose. If the love of money, the passion of love, the zest of gaming, or the fun of any sort of diversion, sweeps you away and controls you, instead of your controlling it, that is the way of the herd—they all do it—and you are Common.

Can you put by a strong desire, forego a cherished ambition, sternly deny yourself position, fame, money, love, yes, even life itself, for the sake of a high principle? There

are just a few such. You are superior. You belong to the Nobility.

V. The superior people are never bitter: If you feel you are a failure, that the world is going to the dogs, that all men are liars, and that there are no good women, it is all quite human, that is the tendency—it is the general slump of the cheap and ordinary mind.

Pessimism is the philosophy of vulgarity. It amounts to dressing up in fine phrases the cowardice of the spirit.

Masterlinck says that to the hero there is no tragedy. No matter how the world and events conspire against him, he rises above them. Friends may betray, and authorities may tyrannize, and the wicked may triumph, but it all cannot touch him.

Take, for instance the death of Socrates. As we read the story of how he was poisoned, like a rat in a hole, of his conversation with his friends as his hour approached, and catch the spirit of the old hero, we are surprised to find we are not sorry for him; we envy him; we are sorry for the villains who did him to death.

So we do not pity Jesus on Calvary. We admire and wonder. The more the ferocity and ingratitude and injustice of men beat upon Him, the higher burns the flame of His imperial spirit. We do not look down upon Him in compassion, we look up and adore.

Neither do we pity them at Marathon, nor those others at Balaklava, nor the marines in the Wood of Belleau. Deep in our hearts we

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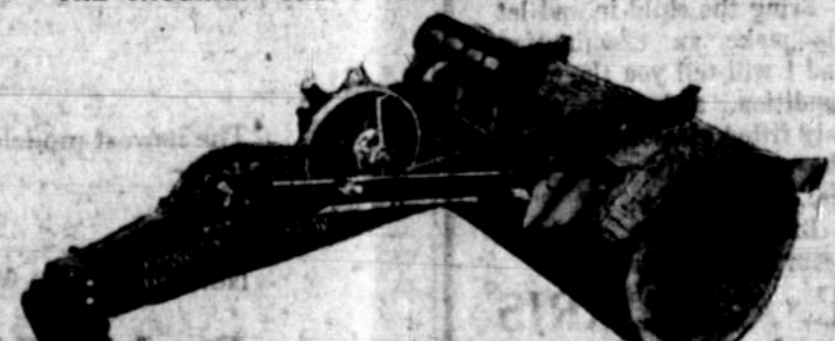
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