

Miner's "The Compleat Gentleman": Benjamin Guggenheim Demonstrates Chivalry on "Titanic"; Glossary: Patrician, Nobility: "Eugenes"; Corinth

- (12) Ancient chivalry, the English gentleman, and concepts of aristocracy are all brought together in a magnificent illustration found in:

Miner, Brad. *The Compleat Gentleman*. (Dallas: Spence Publishing Co., 2004), 8-12, :

KNIGHTS ON A SINKING SHIP. I can tell you exactly when the idea of *The Compleat Gentleman* first began to take shape in my mind. I was with my older son at a screening of James Cameron's maudlin and deceptive blockbuster, *Titanic*, and it was during the climactic scenes of the sinking ship (which I admit are breathtaking) that something happened in the theater that brought home to me how far fallen from reverence the idea of the gentleman has become. And this is a good place to begin, since—thanks to Cameron (and despite his pseudo-marxist spin on the disaster)—the story of chivalry on *Titanic* is probably more familiar to readers than any earlier tale of knights and damsels in distress—even of Authur, Guinevere, Lancelot, and the rest.

Here's what happened in the theatre that day. Up on the screen, the cinematic Benjamin Guggenheim (whose flesh-and-blood equivalent was a real-life passenger on the doomed liner) has come into the ship's barroom dressed in evening clothes, complete with top hat and his liveried manservant. When offered a lifejacket he refuses.

"We are dressed in our best," he says, "and are prepared to go down like gentlemen." Then—with a twinkle in his eye—he adds, "But we *would* like a brandy." (p. 8)

Across the aisle and a few rows back of where my son and I were sitting, several twenty-somethings guffawed. They began talking among themselves and their cachinnations became sniggers. A few folks shushed them, but that just turned their sniggering into snorting. I turned around and stared over at them. My intent was no different than a bird-watcher's, I suppose, a hobbyist's interest in identifying the specimen whose screech I'd just heard in the bush. But one of the young men caught my gaze. He raised his eyebrows: an insouciant gesture meant as a challenge. The look of curiosity that I assume had been on my face disappeared and was replaced by—well, an expression of ill will, I'm sorry to say. He looked away; I didn't. Then suddenly he said to his companions, "Oh let's get the hell out of here." And he made a dash for the exit, his stunned friends following. (pp. 8-9)

An elderly lady sitting in the row just behind us leaned forward and whispered, "You shamed them." She even patted me on the shoulder.

Let's deconstruct this curious collision of fact and fiction, starting with *Titanic's* portrayal of Mr. Guggenheim.

But I need first to confess that as far as I'm concerned, you and I are on *Titanic*. By that I don't mean to postulate some apocalyptic vision of modern culture. What I mean is that we are all sailing through life mostly heedless of tangible peril. I'm certain that the sad saga of the great ship appeals to us in large measure because we recognize that their fate is our fate. Something about the *Titanic* story certainly makes it special. After all, nearly as many people were killed when the *Lusitania* was torpedoed in 1915 (three years after *Titanic* hit the iceberg), and that incident helped propel the United States into World War I. And yet it is *Titanic* that haunts the collective memory, possibly because there is a great difference between an act of war and an act of fate. This and the fact that *Titanic* was hubristically "unsinkable." Just like our dreams of greatness and immortality. (p. 9)

God willing, you and I will not face the horror *Titanic's* passengers and crew did; still we cannot help but wonder how we would endure what they endured. And our speculation is by way of preparing us for such a crisis if and when it does come. Although the compleat gentleman is not a Boy Scout, he is prepared.

It's fair to say of Guggenheim that choosing black tie and a brandy snifter over some (any!) attempt to survive was hardly the only course open for a gentleman on that horrible night. Guggenheim knew his chances of survival were abysmal—if not absolutely nil—and yet he might at least have tried to come through: by grabbing on to some buoyant bit of the disintegrating ship for instance. It would not have made him less chivalrous and certainly not less intrepid. (p. 10)

So perhaps Guggenheim might have survived had he given himself half a chance. But he did not. Still he died like a gentleman. So, presumably, did John Jacob Astor, great-grandson of the first to have that name in America and at the time of the accident one of the richest men in the world. (p. 11)

We'll never know what was in either Guggenheim's or Astor's mind that night, because no one survived with whom either may have discussed his motives. But my guess—and it's only a guess—is that being men of the world (knowing, perhaps, about the suction of sinking ships and the force of hypothermia), each believed with utter certainty that this was the last night of his life and was able to accept that fact and what the code of conduct to which he aspired accordingly demanded of him. (pp. 11-12)

THE PHILOSOPHICAL QUANDARY. The young people in the theater watching *Titanic* and laughing at what they took to be Guggenheim's stuffy stupidity were reacting as I guess we've come to expect many people will. I believe it was the word "gentleman" that ignited their ridicule, and not Guggenheim's peculiar choice of attire. (They did not laugh at the sight of him, only after he had spoken.) They probably assumed that his courage was a sham; that his true feelings were repressed; that only embarrassment prevented him from weeping like a baby or from trampling men, women, and children in a mad scramble to survive. Interesting if true, since one would expect imminent death to overcome such scruples in an upper-class cad, which is pretty much how all the wealthy are portrayed by Mr. Cameron. And there's a part of the Guggenheim story he doesn't tell. (p. 15)

When Guggenheim first came on deck after the collision, he was dressed appropriately, in a warm sweater and a lifejacket. He was among the men recruited by Astor to help find women and children and to assist in their evacuation. But when that work was done—and knowing that there would be, and should be, no place in the lifeboat—Mr. Guggenheim returned to his stateroom and put on his finery, as did his secretary, Mr. Victor Giglio. As Stephen Cox [*The Titanic Story*, Open Court Publishing Co., 1999] describes the moment: "We may not honor, or even understand, the code of moral dignity, of responsibility to oneself, that Guggenheim thought was embodied in his evening clothes. But we can respect his decision to live up to it." (pp. 15-16)

As for me that day in the theater—well, I simply should have ignored the hecklers. I'm probably lucky the bunch of them weren't waiting outside for me when the movie let out. The truth is I felt the need to defend Guggenheim, but don't ask me to further deconstruct the confusion of reality, fantasy, and history that's bound up in the incident, except to say that the elderly woman who thought I'd mortified the hecklers knew why I had reacted as I had, and no doubt she was pleased to think that the virtues of the gentleman were not entirely lost on at least one person born since the big ship sank. She might even have been alive when the wife of the president of the United States dedicated a monument to *Titanic's* heroes. "I do this," Nellie Taft said, "in gratitude to the chivalry of American manhood." (p. 16)

- (13) The idea of chivalry is besmirched today, an illustration found in the fact that those of the younger set question the political correctness of the principle "women and children first." Children, yes! Women? Not so fast!
- (14) If such an incident should occur today a gentleman would be forced to become assertive and insist the ladies abandon ship. The women's loyalty to their politically correct code would be dramatically tested as the men stand onboard in top hat and tails holding their brandy snifters.
- (15) As in our definition, a gentleman is said to have "fine feelings." This implies confidence toward God and courage toward life and circumstances along with application of unconditional love toward all ... even politically correct women.

- (16) No one can exceed the social position of the believer and when it comes to noble birth, his spiritual birth is the noblest of them all.
- (17) Believers are the ultimate in landed gentry. Our heavenly Father possesses the entire universe and we are His children.

Deuteronomy 10:14 - "Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it."

- (18) The Christian who executes the sophisticated spiritual life combines his high rank as a member of God's royal family with chivalrous qualities that are contained in the royal family's honor code.

NOTE: The study *Royal Family Honor Code* is available on audiotape or MP3 by writing Joe Griffin Media Ministries, PO Box 6432, Chesterfield, MO 63006, or you may stream or download the audio by logging onto this page:

http://www.joegriffin.org/MediaMins/archive_id.asp?seriesid=RFHC

- (19) Conduct which conforms to a high standard of propriety and correct behavior is exclusively the Christian's.
- (20) God has only one way of doing a thing and that is the right way. Submission to both the positive and negative mandates of Scripture insures such behavior on the part of the believer.
2. **Patrician:** This word is the Latin equivalent of English's "aristocrat." The upper class ruled Rome while the plebes were the equivalent to present-day hoosiers, rednecks, and white trash.
3. **Patriciate:** This is the same as aristocracy. The patrician class was called the patriciate \pa-tri'-shē-at\, the privileged class of SPQR.
4. **Nobility:** Persons possessing eminence, dignity, high birth, exalted rank, or station. Possessing superiority of mind, character, ideals, or morals. Implies freedom from anything petty, mean, or dubious in conduct or character. Its morality factor implies conformity to established sanctioned codes, or accepted notions of right or wrong.

The Koine Greek word for nobility is defined by:

Spicq, Ceslas. *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by James D. Ernest. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 2:95-96:

εὐγενής, eugenēs. The community of Corinth was for the most part recruited from the poor and obscure social classes. In one of the most oratorical sections of his first letter, Paul emphasizes: "Look at your own call, brothers; not many wise according to the flesh [σοφός, *sophos*], not many powerful [δυνατός, *dunatos*], not many well-born [εὐγενής, *eugenēs*]" (1 Corinthians 1:26). The converts are for the most part not intellectuals, not in positions of authority, not descendants of the old families of the city. To begin with the nobles were identified with the *eupatridēs* [εὐπατρίδης; of noble family; old aristocracy; at Rome, Patricians], the "well-born"; the *eugenēs*, "sons of noble fathers"—gifted with religious and even military privileges. Little by little, this class acquired power and wealth, especially in land, although they did not consider it beneath their dignity to supplement their resources with income from maritime trade; their political influence grew. In the first century, the well-born comprise the urban bourgeoisie, a patrician nobility or aristocracy, who wield patronage and form the dominant, governing class of the city with all the accompanying social prestige. These are the "known" people in a complimentary sense, "the good people, the best people" who take precedence over the others.

Eugenēs and *eugenia*, which recur abundantly in the inscriptions, refer not to a political quality but to a social standing. Aristotle had asked, "what are they that they should be called noble (*eugenēsis*)"—and what is the value of nobility? "Those who have a long line of virtuous or wealthy ancestors are considered to be of better birth (*eugenēsteroi*) than those whose possession of these qualities is recent. The noble can be the good man (*eugenēs ho agathos anēr*), but more precisely nobles are those who have a long line of rich ancestors or virtuous ancestors."

I have mentioned to you the cosmopolitan nature of Corinthian society during the first century. It was a mixture of cultures and classes that accumulated on the Greek Isthmus that linked the northern Greek mainland and the southern peninsula known as the Peloponnese. The Corinthian city lies on a narrow isthmus that is less than four miles across at its narrowest point and separates the Gulf of Corinth to the west from the Saronic Gulf to the east. Ocean commerce used its ports to unload cargo and transport it overland rather than challenge the turbulent waters around the southern shores of the Peloponnese. How all this played into the history of Corinth is addressed in an article on Corinth in the *NIV Archaeological Study Bible*.